AFTER THE BATTLE

GARDELEGEN
MILITARY CEMETERY
HERE LIE 1016 ALLIED PRISONERS OF WAR WHO WERE MURDERED BY THEIR CAPTORS.
THEY WERE BURIED BY CITIZENS OF GARDELEGEN WHO ARE CHARGED WITH RESPONSIBILITY THAT GRAVES ARE FOREVER KEPT AS GREEN AS THE MEMORY OF THESE UNFORTUNATES WILL BE KEPT IN THE HEARTS OF FREEDOM-LOVING MEN EVERYWHERE.
ESTABLISHED UNDER SUPERVISION OF 102 D INFANTRY DIVISION UNITED STATES ARMY.
VANDALISM WILL BE PUNISHED BY MAXIMUM PENALTIES UNDER LAWS OF MILITARY GOVERNMENT.
FRANK A. KEATING
MAJOR GENERAL, U.S.A.
COMMANDING.
GARDELEGEN
MILITÄR-FRIEDHOF
HIER LIEGEN 1016 ALLIIERTE KRIEGSGEFANGENE, DIE VON IHRER WACHE ERMORDET WORDEN SIND.
DIE EINWOHNER VON GARDELEGEN HABEN SIE BEGRABEN UND DIE VERPFLICHTUNG ÜBERNOMMEN DIESE GRÄBER EBENSO FRISCH ZU BEWAHREN, WIE DAS GEDÄCHTNIS DER UNGLÜCKLICHEN IN DEN HERZEN ALLER FREIHEITSLIEBENDEN MENSCHEN BEWAHRT BLEIBEN WIRD.
ERRICHTET UNTER AUFSICHT DER 102-TEN INFANTERIEDIVISION ARMEE DER VEREINIGTEN STAATEN. JEGLICHE SCHÄNDUNG DIESES FRIEDHOFES WIRD GEMÄSS DEN VERORDNUNGEN DER MILITÄR-REGIERUNG MIT DEN SCHWERSTEN STRAFEN GEAHNDET WERDEN.
FRANK A. KEATING
GENIT. U. S. A.
KOMMANDEUR

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Editor: Karel Margry
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Front cover: The sign at Gardelegen, in former East Germany, proclaiming the massacre which bears its name. (Karel Margry)

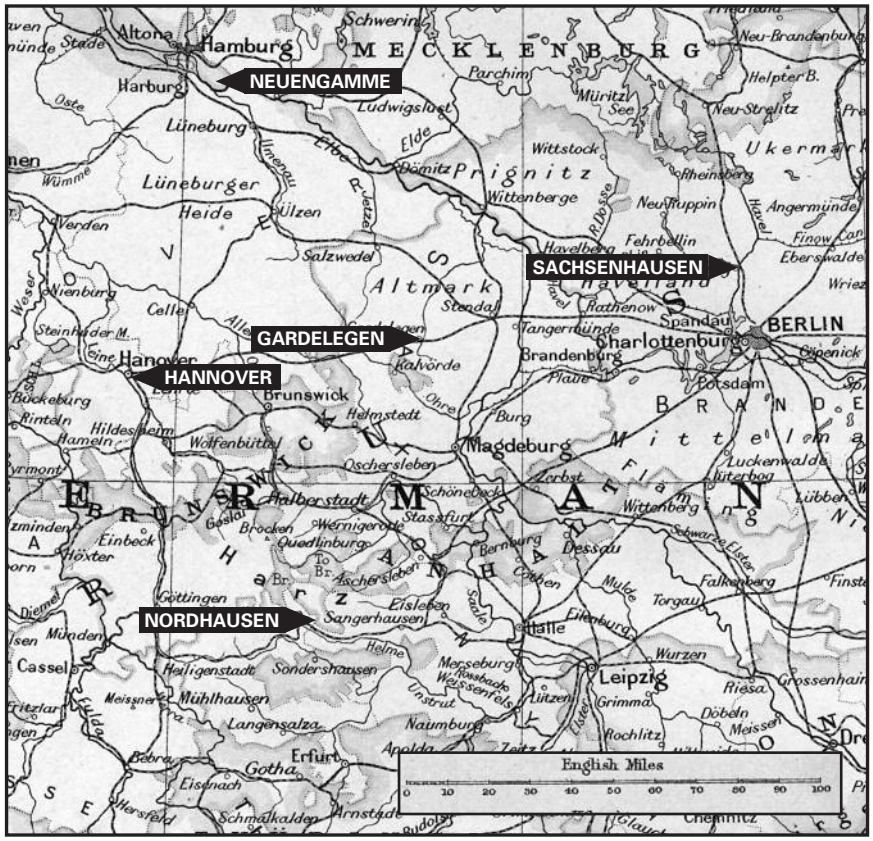
Centre Pages: The cemetery at Gardelegen where local civilians, acting under American orders, buried the victims in 1945. (Karel Margry)

Back cover: The first of the specially designed memorial plaques for 'Firemen Remembered' was erected on the wall of Henry Cavendish School in Balham exactly 60 years after the incident which killed 13 personnel at what was in November 1940 Sub-Station 86W.

Acknowledgements: The Gardelegen story is primarily based on the US War Crimes Investigation Team file on the Gardelegen case, an original copy of which is held at the Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie in Amsterdam. The Editor would like to thank Dr Herbert Becker, director of the Gardelegen Stadtmuseum and of the Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Gardelegen for his help with the story, and especially for retaking some of the comparison photographs for us. He also extends his thanks to Frau Dipl.-Hist. Wally Schulz, former director of the Stadtmuseum.

Photo Credits: IWM — Imperial War Museum, London; LFCDA — London Fire and Civil Defence Authority; MGG — Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Gardelegen; NIOD — Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie, Amsterdam; USNA — US National Archives.

The Isenschnibbe barn stood in open fields just north-east of Gardelegen town. The prisoners marched there from the Remonte-Schule barracks on Bismarker Strasse. This is a contemporary annotated plan from the US War Crimes Investigation Team's file. We have added the position of the school and barn.



Most of the prisoners murdered at Gardelegen came from slave-labour camps of the 'Mittelbau' complex around Nordhausen, 120 kilometres to the south of Gardelegen, with others coming from Hannover-Stöcken, a sub-camp of Neuengamme, 120 kilometres due west of Gardelegen.

On April 15, 1945, soldiers of the US 102nd Infantry Division patrolling outside the small German town of Gardelegen discovered the site of a what was perhaps the most horrendous of all Nazi atrocities. Two days before, on April 13, SS concentration camp guards and Fallschirmjäger soldiers had locked over a thousand camp prisoners of the Reich in a big barn and set it on fire, throwing in hand-grenades and firing Panzerfaust rounds into the interior. Anyone trying to escape from the burning, smoke-filled building was shot. As a result a total of 1,016 men died. Although unparalleled in cruelty and horror, the murder action at the Isenschnibbe barn was not an isolated case as there were several other instances of mass shootings of prisoners in the Gardelegen area during the same week. (IWM)

THE GARDELEGEN MASSACRE

By Karel Margry

On the morning of April 15, 1945, soldiers of the 2nd Battalion, 405th Infantry, of the US 102nd Infantry Division were engaged in a routine search of the area around the Luftwaffe airfield at Gardelegen, a small recently-captured town 50 kilometres northwest of Magdeburg in northern Germany, when they discovered evidence of a recent Nazi atrocity. At the top of a small hill overlooking the airfield and the town, they found a big masonry harvest-storage barn. Several bodies wearing striped prison garments lay in the green spring wheat nearby, riddled with bullet wounds and showing peculiar burns. Taking a closer look at the barn, the GIs saw five more bodies sprawled through a jagged hole in the brick-work. When one of the barn's great wooden doors was pushed open, there emerged a cloud of smoke and a revolting stench of burned flesh. Overcoming their nausea, the soldiers explored the interior. There they found, heaped in every conceivable contortion of agony and death, the charred and smoking bodies of hundreds of men. The Americans had discovered the site of what would became notorious as the Gardelegen massacre.

The 1,016 unfortunates who were found murdered at the barn at Gardelegen were all inmates of Nazi concentration camps — some of them Jews, most of them political prisoners. They had been marched to the barn from the Remonte-Schule (Remount School), an army school for training cavalry horses on Bismarker Strasse in Gardelegen town. Its official name since 1936 was Wehrkreis Reit- und Fahrschule (Military District Riding and Driving School). The Remonte-Schule barracks was itself no concentration camp but had only become a reception centre for wandering groups of camp prisoners in the few days preceding the massacre. These prisoners had arrived in the Gardelegen area by train at two different places: Letzlingen, 12 kilometres south of Gardelegen, and Mieste, 12 kilometres west of the town. For clarity, it is best to follow the events as they unfolded at each of these arrival points in turn, but first we must describe the general background that led up to the massacre.

In early 1945, faced with the unstoppable advance of the Soviet army on the Eastern front, the Germans began evacuating the concentration and extermination camps in the East. In exhausting foot marches the starved and weakened inmates were driven westwards. Those unable to keep up the march tempo were ruthlessly shot by their SS guards, their bodies left by the wayside. The aimed destination of these 'death marches' were the concentration camps in central Germany, mostly Bergen-Belsen, Neuengamme, Ravensbrück, Sachsenhausen, Dachau and Mauthausen. However, as the Allied advance from East and West continued, many camps inside Germany itself became threatened too, and their inmates were hurriedly moved off in turn on foot or by rail to other destinations.

One of the installations evacuated in early April 1945 was 'Dora-Mittelbau', the complex of camps and sub-camps housing the slave labourers for the underground factories around the town of Nordhausen which produced the V1 flying bomb and V2 rocket and others of Germany's secret weapons (see *After the Battle* No. 101). Preparation for the evacuation of the 40,000 inmates then surviving in the 'Dora' main camp and its various satellite camps began on April 1. Between April 4 and 7, all camps were emptied, groups of inmates departing by train to destinations in northern Germany — Bergen-Belsen, Neuengamme, Sachsenhausen, Ravensbrück — or marching out to the north and east.

The small station of Letzlingen, 12 kilometres south of Gardelegen, where the train evacuating about 1,100 slave workers from the 'Mittelbau' camps of Wieda, Osterhagen, Nüxei and Mackenrode came to a halt on April 11. The SS guards, indecisive on what to do next, first allowed the prisoners to run away, then opened fire on them with automatic weapons. Most of the survivors were rounded up, with a total of about 185 being marched to Gardelegen, some of which would end up in the murder barn two days later. Few of the survivors from this train knew the name of the station where their rail journey had ended. Hence, Letzlingen was hardly mentioned in any of the survivor statements collected by the US Army war crimes investigators after the atrocity. Some survivors thought they had alighted at Zienau, a station on the main Hannover-Berlin line three kilometres south-east of Gardelegen; others mentioned a place called Ortschen or Ochen; some — probably because they had heard where the other train had stopped — even named Mieste. Only one man named Letzlingen. In their final report, the US investigators concluded the train had stopped at Zienau. Although this was mistaken, the name stuck and many historians since have said that at least some of the atrocity victims came from the station there. The Letzlingen line was lifted in the 1970s, and the station now lies disused.

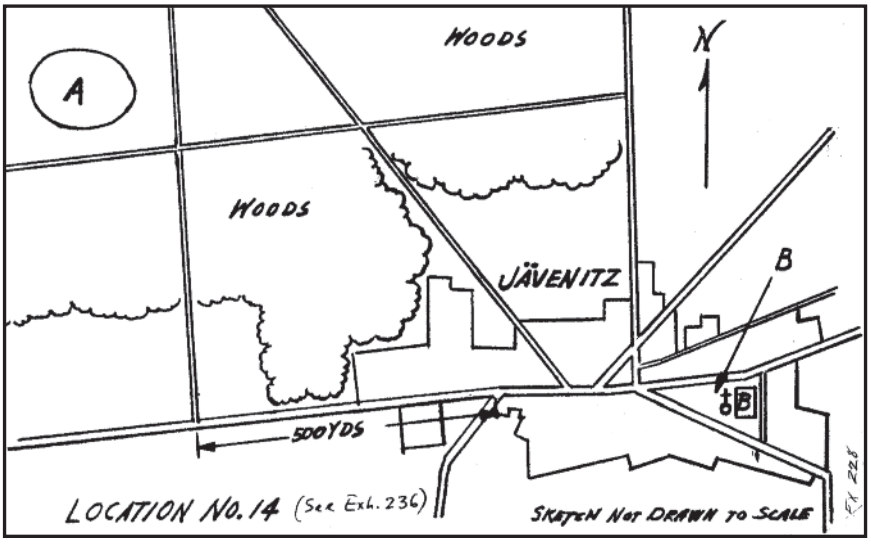
THE LETZLINGEN TRAIN

The first of the 'Mittelbau' evacuations that would end up at Gardelegen consisted of the inmates of the small satellite camps at Wieda, Osterhagen, Nüxei and Mackenrode, housing the slave workers of SS-Bau-Brigade 3. On April 6, the men from the latter three camps were first marched to Wieda. From there, on the 7th the assembled prisoners, numbering about 1,135, set off northwards through the Harz mountains, in two march groups of 400; the 335 men too sick to walk were put on a narrow-gauge train. The walking groups spent the first night together under the open sky in an open field in the forest between Braunlage and Elend, the second night in an empty labour camp at Wernigerode and in a small munitions factory just before that town respectively. Here they were reunited with the sick inmates who had travelled there by rail. On the morning of the 9th, the whole group of 1,130 was put on a train consisting of closed freight cars which set out from Wernigerode northwards. So far, the evacuation had been led by SS-Untersturmführer (2nd Lieutenant) Kurt Merkle, the deputy commander of SS-Bau-Brigade 3, but he left at Wernigerode, leaving SS-Stabscharführer (Staff Sergeant) Kemnitz as Transportführer (convoy commander).

The train made a wide detour to the north-west, making long stops at various stations and stopping for the night at Jerxheim. Late on the 10th it reached the western suburbs of Magdeburg, which had just suffered an Allied air raid and where Allied fighter-bombers strafed the train. American ground forces were already in the southern outskirts, and all Elbe bridges in the city had been blown, so the train had no option but to go north. Continuing via secondary lines through Gross-Ammensleben, Neuhaldensleben and Wannefeld/Roxförde, at around 1730 hours on the 11th the train rolled into the small station outside the village of Letzlingen, 12 kilometres south-east of Gardelegen.

The train was shunted on to a side track, its last wagon — carrying the convoy kitchen, food supplies and the luggage and bicycles of the SS guards — was unhinged, moved to another line, and unloaded. Artillery fire of the approaching Americans could be heard in the distance. Clearly the SS were deliberating what to do next. Transportführer Kemnitz was overheard saying: 'What shall we do with them? Let them go or shoot them?' Several of his men took the opportunity to change into civilian clothes and take off.

Shortly after, there occurred a confusing situation when Allied fighter-bombers passed over the train at low level. Apparently, Transportführer Kemnitz told some of the prisoners to run away and this, combined with the panic caused by the air attack, resulted in a mass escape by the prisoners. Throwing open the unlocked doors, hundreds of men jumped from the wagons and ran off, most of them towards the woods to the west. They had not gone far when the SS guards opened fire on them with machine pistols and mowed down a great many of them. Of those that kept running, a few made good their escape, but many were recaptured, not a few being shot on the spot. (The bodies of 33 prisoners were later found at Letzlingen, 10 at Wannefeld, and another 23 at Roxförde.) About 165-185 were surrounded and rounded up by Luftwaffe soldiers at Neue Mühle near the hamlet of Polvitz, five kilometres to the north-west. They were marched off to Gardelegen, a first group of 125 setting out at 2130 hours and arriving at the Remonte School before midnight. A second group of 40-60 left after midnight, reaching the Remonte-Schule at 0700 on the 12th.



A group of 125 prisoners from the Letzlingen train was marched out of Gardelegen eastward early on the 12th. Next morning, April 13, two SS men and two Luftwaffe soldiers led them into a wood just west of the village of Jävenitz and opened fire on them, killing 31. They were buried in 17 makeshift graves. This sketch showing the site of the murder action and graves [A] comes from the file on the Gardelegen case prepared by the US Ninth Army's war crimes investigators in April-May 1945. (NIOD)

Of these two groups from Letzlingen, only the second one would end up as a victim of the Gardelegen massacre. The first contingent of 125 would narrowly escape it. Early on the 12th, about the time that the other group came in, they were marched off again, towards the east. They spent the night in a big farm barn near the village of Jävenitz, seven kilometres on from Gardelegen. Next morning, April 13, the group was taken into the forest. There arrived two SS-Unterscharführers with two Luftwaffe soldiers, who ordered the ethnic Germans among the prisoners to step aside, and then opened fire with machine pistols on the remainder, killing 31. The others made a run for it, scattering in the surrounding woods. Armed parties of Volkssturm (home guard) and Hitlerjugend teenagers began a man-hunt of the area, searching farms and woods for the escapees. Four men were shot by a Hitlerjugend boy at the neighbouring village of Hottendorf. By noon, most of the fugitives, about 96, had been recaptured and assembled at Jävenitz.

At 1930, an order arrived that these prisoners were to be taken back to Gardelegen. Luftwaffe soldiers quick-marched them to the airfield there, but by the time they arrived, about 2000 hours, smoke was already billowing up from the massacre barn on the horizon, and they were told to return to Jävenitz. Later that night, Erich Matthies, a civilian who owned a tractor with two trailers, was told to bring the prisoners to the Remonte-Schule. He left at midnight, but when he reached the barracks, it was empty of prisoners and the sentries at the gate told him: 'You have come too late. We don't want any prisoners'. Matthies took the 96 men in his custody back to Jävenitz. The burgomaster, Fritz Matthies (Erich's brother), hid them in a barn near the village for two days, providing them with hot food and coffee. On April 15, the 96 were liberated there by the Americans.

After the mass escape and the subsequent round-up, there remained some 700 prisoners at the Letzlingen railway station, guarded by the few remaining SS guards and by Volkssturm men. Most of them never got near Gardelegen, but were marched off the following morning (April 12) in the general direction of the Elbe. One small group of only 30 marched south-east towards Colbitz, 15 kilometres away, where they were liberated by troops of the US 30th Division on the 13th.

A much larger group of some 570 set off along a secondary road due east. Convoy commander Kemnitz had requisitioned 16 trucks and horse-drawn carts from the local population to carry the sick and invalid. They brought them as far as Dolle, the first next village ten kilometres on. From there, all were required to walk. Some 66 prisoners were killed, those too feeble to walk being shot by the guards and others, caught escapees, being clubbed to death by civilians. The rest marched on to the next village, Burgstall, where they camped for the night. Here the NSDAP-Ortsgruppenleiter (Nazi party local leader), Kurt Möhring, and a local lawyer, Hermann Prett, prevented the guards from another mass shooting by producing a fake 'counter-order'. Thus saved, this group of 500 was liberated by troops of the US 35th Division that afternoon, April 13.

Yet a third group, about 100 strong, set off due east, guarded by SS and armed Kapos (prisoners with authority over other prisoners). They actually crossed the Elbe river in small boats, marching on to the town of Brandenburg and then north-east, aiming for Sachsenhausen. During their two-week trek, about half of them died of exhaustion or were shot by the guards. Others managed to escape, the lucky ones being finally liberated by the Soviet Army in the last days of April.

The spot in the woods where the prisoners were murdered and buried.

The 31 victims of the massacre in the woods were recovered by the US Army on May 13, 1945, and re-interred at the Jävenitz village cemetery — [B] on the sketch. The recovery and reburial was supervised by Captain Luther E. Gowder and a detail of the 381st Field Artillery Battalion of the 102nd Division. Picture taken by Army photographer Tech/5 Philip R. Mark of the 168th Signal Photographic Company. (NIOD)

The Jävenitz cemetery today. The individual crosses have gone and the memorial on the grave plot, placed there in GDR times, states the number of dead buried there as 28.

Mieste station, 12 kilometres west of Gardelegen, end of rail journey for some 1,400 inmates evacuated from the 'Mittelbau' camps of Rottleberode, Stempeda, Ilfeld and Ellrich, and for the 300-400 living skeletons evacuated from the Hannover-Stöcken sick bay. Their respective trains arrived at Mieste shortly after one another on April 9. After languishing in the railway yard for nearly three days, and with the American army coming ever nearer, the prisoners were marched away to the east on the 11th, most of them to meet their end in the murder barn at Gardelegen. Army photographer Tech/5 Philip E. Mark took these pictures of the abandoned evacuation trains on May 11, precisely a month to the day after the death march from the station began. The prisoners' train is the one on the track closest to the camera. On the left is the cement factory where turnip soup was handed out to the starved prisoners on the second day — for many their only meal in over a week. (NIOD)

THE MIESTE TRAIN

The second Nordhausen group to end up at Gardelegen was made up of inmates from the 'Mittelbau' satellite camps Rottleberode, Stempeda, Ilfeld and Ellrich, with inmates from Nordhausen's main camp 'Dora' and a few stragglers from one or two other camps being added in.

On the evening of April 4, the some 1,500 inmates of Rottleberode and nearby Stempeda were assembled and marched off to the railway station of Niedersachswerfen, 18 kilometres away. They left in two groups — one of 400 led by the Lagerführer (deputy camp commander) of Rottleberode, SS-Hauptscharführer (Sergeant Major) Erhard Brauny, and one of 1,100 led by the camp commander of Stempeda, SS-Unterscharführer Hermann Lamp. It was a harsh night march, in cold rain and over the muddy slippery roads of the Harz foothills.

Brauny's group of 400 reached Niedersachswerfen on the morning of the 5th, but the prisoners had to wait until afternoon before a train became available for them. It was made up of some 15 open boxcars, of which ten turned out to be already filled with some 600 inmates from other 'Mittelbau' camps: 300 from Ilfeld, the rest perhaps from main camp 'Dora', perhaps from the overflow camp at the Boelcke Barracks in Nordhausen town.

The 300 Ilfeld inmates had left their camp on foot at 0900 that morning led by the deputy camp commander, SS-Unterscharführer (Sergeant) Hermann Rose, and had reached Niedersachswerfen, six kilometres on, at 1030. They were kept separate from the inmates of other camps, being loaded in six cars: one for their 13 SS guards, one for the baggage and four for the prisoners.

Brauny's 400 were ordered to climb aboard the remaining six cars, but the train did not leave as Brauny waited all day for the other Rottleberode column to arrive. Finally, driving back there on a motor cycle, Brauny learned that Lamp's group had taken another route. He decided to go without them, but it was past noon on April 6 before the train finally left Niedersachswerfen. It only drove to Ellrich station, seven kilometres on, where it stopped again.

The same view today. The new tracks for the Intercity Express super-fast train were added in the 1990s.

Late in the evening another five open-topped boxcars were hooked on, and in these, during the night, were loaded some 400 inmates from Ellrich-Bürgergarten, the satellite camp housing slave workers of SS-Bau-Brigade 4: all of the camp's 200 sick inmates, plus 150-200 Jewish prisoners from camp Mackenrode who had been shoved off to Ellrich on March 26. This group was accompanied by 15 guards under SS-Oberscharführer (Quartermaster Sergeant) Locke. A few inmates from Woffleben camp and Russian prisoners from 'Dora' are said to have boarded the train here too.

The whole train, now 20 cars long and carrying some 1,400 prisoners and 100 guards, left Ellrich early on the 7th with Brauny as senior Transportführer. It travelled west to Herzberg, then north to Osterode (some sources say that the 300 Ilfeld inmates boarded the train here, but that is not correct). For food, each prisoner had received a loaf of bread and a small tin of meat paste. To protect their weak, emaciated bodies during the cold ride in open wagons, they had only their thin camp garments and a few blankets. Each car contained 60 to 100 persons. They had no room to sit or lie down and had to sleep on top of each other. During the journey numerous men died from hunger or cold. Their dead bodies lay squeezed among the living in the wagons.

Just outside Osterode, at the village of Lasfelde, the train was attacked by American fighter-bombers. The locomotive was heavily damaged and three SS men (the SS from Rottleberode travelled in the waggon behind the locomotive) and five prisoners were killed, and several others wounded. Two Russian prisoners were shot by an SS guard as they tried to open the wagon containing

Above: **A further 17 boxcars stood abandoned just east of the level crossing, as shown in this shot looking the other way. There is still some unclarity about how many prisoner evacuation trains ended up stranded at Mieste. There is no doubt about the one from 'Mittelbau' and the one from Hannover-Stöcken. The former had about 20 waggons, and the latter eight, making a total of 28. However, the American sketch indicates a total of 54 boxcars in the station. The additional cars may well have arrived with other cargo (some of the cars on the right-hand track in the previous shot certainly look like they carried ordinary freight), or after the prisoners left, but they also leave the possibility that other prisoner transports did end up in Mieste as well. Some accounts mention a train with inmates from Neuengamme arriving on the night of April 10/11, but there is nothing in the survivor testimonies to substantiate this. (NIOD)** *Below:* **Looking east from Mieste railway station today.**

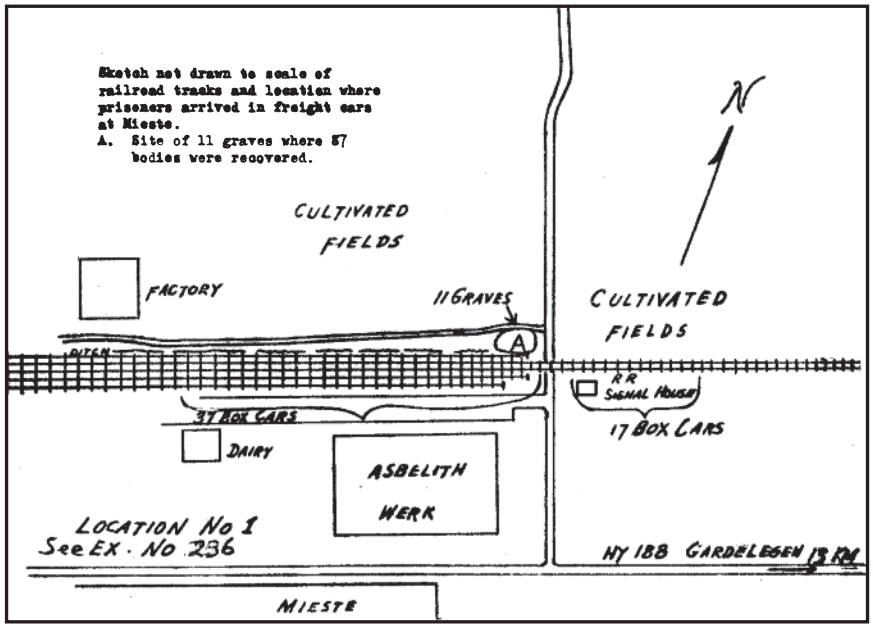
the food. The SS and local medics took care of the German casualties, leaving the prisoners to bury their dead in a common grave beside the track. In the panic caused by the air attack, numerous prisoners jumped from the train but it is not known how many succeeded to flee or how many were shot while doing so. The SS guards, helped by Volkssturm and Hitlerjugend from the village, started rounding them up as soon as the air raid was over.

A new locomotive was arranged and the train continued its journey, only to stop for an another air raid alarm at Badenhausen, four kilometres on. No aircraft appeared, but again there were escape attempts, followed by man-hunts, and escapees being shot. After this, the train continued north via Seesen, Salzgitter and Braunschweig to Gifhorn, where it turned east on the main Hannover-Berlin line towards Oebisfelde, where it stopped for the night of April 8/9.

The man in charge at Mieste was SS-Hauptscharführer Erhard Brauny, the senior convoy commander of the 'Mittelbau' train. Born on October 17, 1913, Brauny had joined the Hitlerjugend in 1930 and become a member of both the NSDAP and the SS in 1932. In September 1939 he was posted to Buchenwald camp, becoming a Kommandoführer at the Tondorf-Erfurt sub-camp in January 1940, and guard leader at the Cologne sub-camp in August 1941. In August 1943, he was assigned to camp 'Dora' at Nordhausen, where he served as roll-call leader and block leader. In November 1944, he became deputy commander of the Rottleberode sub-camp. In all of these positions, he gained a terrible reputation for beating, killing and starving prisoners. On April 4, 1945, he led the evacuation of Rottleberode, beginning an odyssey that would bring the inmates to Mieste, and eventually to death in Gardelegen.

(Other sources say it already turned east at Braunschweig, going to Helmstedt, then north again on secondary lines via Marienborn and Weferlingen to Oebisfelde.) Whatever its precise route, the shift to the east was apparently caused by an order which Brauny had received on the 8th to change the train's destination from Neuengamme in northern Germany to a camp in the east, probably Sachsenhausen.

In the early morning of April 9, the train came to a final halt at the railway station at Mieste, 12 kilometres west of Gardelegen, its further journey to Stendal blocked by destruction of the rail tracks at Solpke, six kilometres ahead. (Some sources state that the 300 inmates from Ilfeld already got off at Bergfriede, a station ten kilometres west of Mieste, but this is not correct.) The locomotive was uncoupled and driven off, leaving the train stranded in the railway yard. The three convoy commanders — Brauny from Rottleberode, Rose from Ilfeld, and Locke from Ellrich — conferred on what to do next. Brauny telephoned the SS main office in charge of concentration camps at Sachsenhausen for instructions, but the authorities there apparently told him to make his own decisions.



Situation sketch of Mieste station prepared by the US investigators. (NIOD)

Shortly after, another prisoner evacuation transport rolled into Mieste — bringing with it the third main group that would end up at Gardelegen. It did not come from 'Dora-Mittelbau' but from the slave labour camp at Hannover-Stöcken, a satellite of Neuengamme concentration camp housing the slave workers for the Accumulatoren-Fabrik AG in Stöcken which produced batteries for U-boats and torpedo engines. The majority of its inmates had left for Bergen-Belsen on the 6th, but 600 sick prisoners had been left behind in the camp hospital. Early on the 8th, they were all perched into eight cattle cars. Many of them suffered from dysentery, quite a few were naked. There was no place for any patient to lie down, no water, and only a few loafs of bread thrown in before departure. The train had no guards and, during a stop in Hannover station, 150 prisoners escaped. At 0600 on the 9th this train reached Mieste station and was shunted behind the 'Mittelbau' train. When its doors were opened, many of the 300-450 men inside were too weak even to crawl out. Several had died on the journey. The SS guards of Brauny's train shot the weaker survivors and took over guarding the others. (When Brauny's train arrived at Mieste there already was another stranded train standing in the station yard but it appears that this was not a prisoner evacuation transport.)

With two prisoner trains stranded at Mieste the combined number of prisoners there now amounted to some 1,500-1,800. By now, the starved prisoners had had nothing to eat for days. Some were lucky to find a few raw potatoes. Others ate grass taken from the railway embankment. The only drinking water was from a ditch alongside the track. Civilians who felt pity for these unfortunates and wanted to give them some bread or milk were reproved by others or chased off by the guards. Burgomaster Adolf Krüger of Mieste refused to distribute food to the prisoners, but on the 10th — on orders of Landrat (region commissioner) Dr Daue — Oberleutnant Fritz Hesse of the Oebisfelde gendarmerie arranged for a meal to be cooked, ordering the supply of 130lb of meat, 2,500lb of potatoes, 1,200lb of turnips and 6lb of coffee. This meal, cooked in the cement factory beside the track and handed out by the guards, was totally inadequate to feed all. Many prisoners were too feeble to be able to stand in the food line. Others fought each other for what food they got, watched by laughing guards. While at Mieste some 60 men succumbed to hunger and thirst, most of them from the Hannover-Stöcken group.

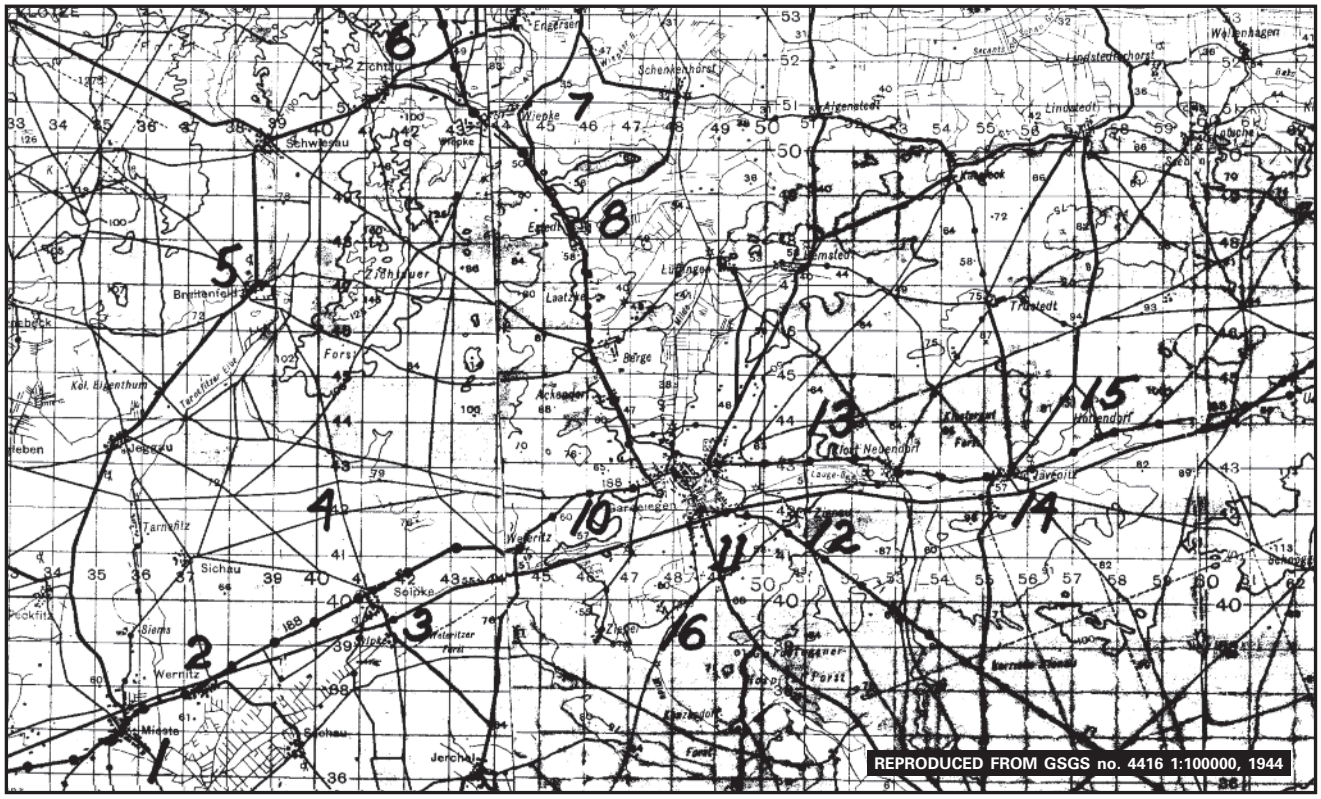
The SS guards left the task of guarding the trains mostly to the Kapos, arming some of them with rifles, while they themselves got drunk in the local cafes. To reinforce the guard, members of the local Volkssturm, Hitlerjugend, and soldiers from Luftwaffe units stationed in the area took up position around the railway yard.

Late on the 9th a group of Luftwaffe soldiers led by a lieutenant shot eight prisoners who wanted to get some corn from a nearby grain storage. Obergefreiter Franz Unvertorben, a guard from Ellrich, killed three prisoners who had collapsed from hunger with a bullet through the head. Even prisoners who wanted to relieve themselves in the cement factory were shot. In all, some 25 men were killed by guards at Mieste. Prisoner details carried the dead to a spot beside the track where they could be buried. A total of 86 bodies was later recovered from here.

On the morning of the 11th, Allied fighter-bombers attacked the train and one bomb fell on the railway yard, causing everyone to scurry in all directions. In the melée, some 17 prisoners were shot by the guards, a few managed to escape.

About 50-60 prisoners had died from hunger or exhaustion, either during the train journey or during the three days at Mieste. Another 25-30 were murdered by the German guards, either because they had collapsed or were looking for food or because they ran away when Allied aircraft strafed the station on the 12th. Prisoner details buried a total of 86 dead prisoners in a plot beside the level crossing. Directed by Lieutenant Colonel Edward E. Cruise, one of the officers investigating the Gardelegen case, Tech/5 Mark pictured their disinterment on April 11. (NIOD)

The same plot today, now a weed-filled gravel pit.



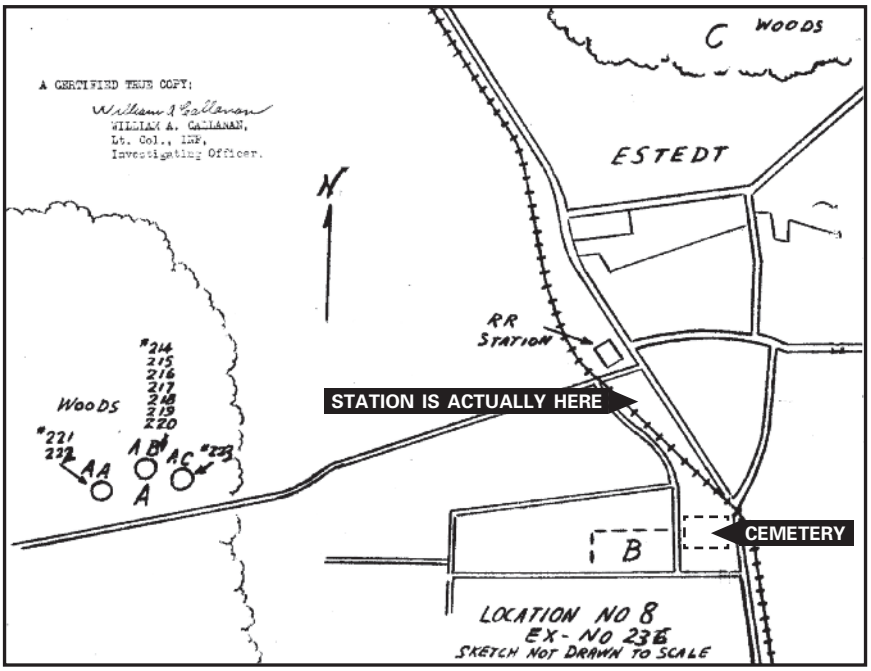
The master map from the US Army war crimes file shows all the major locations around Gardelegen, except Letzlingen. The routes of the death marches from Mieste to Gardelegen can be traced on them as well. [1] Mieste. [2] Wernitz. [3] Solpke. [4] Forest intersection where guards shot 15 prisoners. [5] Breitenfeld. [6] Zichtau. [7] Wiepke. [8] Estedt. [10] Gardelegen. [11] Lindenthal. [12] Zienau. [13] Kloster Neuendorf. [14] Jävenitz. [15] Hottendorf. [16] Ipse. (NIOD)

At 1130, Transportführer Brauny received word that the Americans were only 13 kilometres away and rapidly approaching. He ordered that all prisoners be marched off to the east. Before departure, each prisoner received three or four potatoes. The prisoners left in three groups of different size. Those unable to walk, about 200-300, were transported on 21 horse-drawn carts requisitioned by burgomaster Krüger. The column was followed by a detail of 10-20 prisoners who had orders to bury anyone who died or was shot on the way.

The first group, which left around noon, initially marched east along the R188 main road towards Gardelegen. At Wernitz, only two kilometres further on, Fallschirmjäger lined up 25 of the weaker prisoners along the side of the road and killed them with machine pistols. At Solpke, about halfway to Gardelegen, the group began a wide detour to the north through the woods. When they reached an intersection in the forest, the guards allowed them to rest but about 15 prisoners who were too exhausted to go on were shot and buried on the spot. Passing through Breitenfeld, the remainder reached Zichtau at 2200, where they rested for an hour before turning south again following the R71 main road through Wiepke and Estedt to reach Gardelegen and the Remonte-Schule at about 0530 hours on the 12th.

The second group initially marched northeast along secondary roads through the woods towards Breitenfeld. Just after leaving Mieste, the column was strafed by Allied aircraft. Armed townspeople helped to round up the scattered prisoners. From Breitenfeld, the column cut due east and reached the village of Estedt where they turned north on to the R71 towards Wiepke. Shortly before dark, a German officer passing on a motorbike shouted to the guards that American tanks were coming towards them. The SS men quickly ordered the column to about face, beating them and firing their weapons to make them obey. Shortly after, the SS men fled. The prisoners, now free, stopped to camp for the night at Grauen Busch, a copse to the east of the main road between Wiepke and Schenkenhorst.

A few hours later, Fallschirmjäger troops took over the guarding of this dwindling group. (Gardelegen was the main depot of Germany's Fallschirmjäger troops, and there were many paratroop units stationed in the area. By 1945 they were mostly made up of redundant Luftwaffe personnel assigned to the Fallschirmjäger army.) Between April 11-13 these Fallschirmjäger exercised a ruthless reign of terror, shooting most of the prisoners that came into their hands. One of the largest executions took place on the morning of the 12th at a locality known as Sandkuhle, in the woods just west of the Estedt railway station. On orders of NSDAP-Ortsgruppenleiter Fritz Korts, a



The second-largest mass murder in the Gardelegen area (after that at the barn) took place at the village of Estedt, seven kilometres north of Gardelegen, Here, on April 12, Fallschirmjäger soldiers executed 104 prisoners in a wood behind the village railway station, burying them in three large pits and two smaller ones. (NIOD)

Left: **A month later, German civilians recovered the remains of the victims under American supervision. This pit, [AA] on the sketch, contained 60 bodies. (NIOD)** *Right:* **The same spot in the woods today.**

The presence of the mass graves in the forest remained unknown to the Americans until May 9, 1945, when a freed Polish worker reported them to 1st Lieutenant Kenneth L. Russ, commander of 2nd Platoon, Battery D, 548th Anti-Aircraft Artillery & Automatic Weapons Battalion, which had been assigned Military Government duties at Estedt. Russ warned higher authorities and next day Lieutenant Colonel William A. Calannan, one of the officers investigating the Gardelegen war crimes, instructed him to have the bodies recovered and properly buried. Russ informed the burgomaster to have all the able-bodied men out on the morning of May 11 to carry out the task. This pit, [AB] on the sketch, contained 30 dead. (NIOD)

A GI watches while the corpses are put on the cart. (NIOD)

Nothing remains to mark the massacre that took place here.

group of six Fallschirmjäger commanded by Oberleutnant Helmut Hockhauf told local civilians to bring prisoners, both dead and live ones, thereto on horse-drawn carts. Six Polish forced labourers and three German civilians were ordered to dig two big trenches. The prisoners arrived in five cartloads — three of 30-35 men each, one of 10, and one of 4. The dead prisoners were thrown into the grave pits. Those still alive were made to kneel on the edge and killed by the paratroopers with a neck shot. The prisoners from the second cart had to cover those of the first with a layer of sand, before they too were shot and pushed into the same hole. One Pole kissed the shoes of one of the soldiers, begging not to shoot him, but he too was killed. The soldiers were enjoying themselves, callously joking and smoking cigarettes while they carried out the mass murder. A total of 104 dead were later recovered from this spot, plus another six from individual graves around the town.

That same afternoon, a group of some 120 prisoners who had become separated from the main column at Grauen Busch, and had spent the night without guards, was overtaken near Estedt by nine Fallschirmjäger in a car who again took them prisoner and led them into a wood (probably the same one where Oberleutnant Hockhauf's men had just shot the others). The prisoners were told to undress, and six of them were ordered to dig a trench. At the last moment, a messenger arrived in a car with an order from the Gardelegen chief of police that the prisoners were to be taken to the Remonte School at Gardelegen. The messenger was Hans-Joachim Korts, son of Ortsgruppenleiter Korts. After shooting those prisoners that had fainted on the spot, the Fallschirmjäger sent the men on their way, without escort, south to Gardelegen, where they arrived at the Remonte-Schule about 2200 hours on the 12th.

The remnants of the group camping at Grauen Busch, about 80-100 men, were transported to Gardelegen on horse-drawn wagons in the afternoon of the 13th. They too would become victims of the barn massacre.

By then, the third group from Mieste — the carts carrying the weak and the ill, with a column of marching prisoners in front — had long since arrived at Gardelegen. Guarded by only two SS men, it had followed the first group to Solpke. Here 23 of the prisoners were shot. The rest of the column stayed for the night in a farm barn at the village. Next morning, April 12, they made a small loop south across the railway to Solpke-Süd, recrossing it three kilometres further on at Weteritz before turning east onto the R188 main road again to reach the Remonte-Schule about 0500.

All along the various routes from Mieste, hastily-dug graves marked the places where prisoners had been shot or died from exhaustion: 33 at Wernitz, 23 at Solpke, 20 at Breitenfeld, 10 at Zichtau, 110 at Estedt, 8 at Berge.

The reaction of the German population to the sight of these columns of pitiable creatures passing their farms and villages showed the entire spectrum of human behaviour, varying from outright hatred . . . to total indifference . . . to compassion and help. Too often, citizens assisted the henchmen by denouncing prisoners for taking away a few beets or potatoes, by pointing out where escapees were hiding. Many who ventured to offer food or drink to the famished prisoners were chased off by guards. A handful risked their lives giving shelter to escapees. Farm milker Karl Stegert from Weteritz helped three prisoners hiding in a hay loft, providing them with food and civilian clothes for three days until liberation. Vicar Friedrich Franz of Gardelegen and his wife hid four Dutch prisoners in their stable and cared for them until the arrival of the Americans.

The 104 bodies recovered from the wood were buried in the Estedt village cemetery together with six more prisoners, murdered by the Fallschirmjäger, whose remains had been found in single graves in and around Estedt. (NIOD)

The same plot in Estedt cemetery today. The individual crosses have gone, and the large central cross has been moved to a corner of the plot. (The position of the cemetery [B] as given on the sketch is not quite accurate, so we have added the correct position.)

A formal funeral ceremony was held on May 12, with Lieutenant Russ' platoon of the 548th AAA & AW Battalion furnishing the Guard of Honour. The wood visible on the horizon is where the mass murder had taken place. (NIOD)

Even as they entered Gardelegen, the men in their striped prison garments were not safe from persecution. Throughout the 12th and the 13th, murder squads from the SS and Fallschirmjäger soldiers on motorbikes roamed the streets, opening fire on prisoners straggling behind a column or spotted without escort. Four were shot in Bahnhofstrasse, two in front of the St Spiritus Hospital, two near the Salzwedeler Tor, and four on Marktplatz. At least 12 persons were thus killed in the town. Their corpses were taken to the town cemetery and buried in common graves.

Thus, by the afternoon of Friday, April 13, a large number of camp prisoners — well over 1,000 — was assembled at the Remonte-Schule. The order to concentrate them in one place had been given by Gardelegen's acting burgomaster, Karl Lepa, on Tuesday the 10th after he saw the first groups of prisoners passing through his town. Initially they had been assembled at the Schützenhaus hall in the centre of town but when this became too crowded (and also because the citizens feared that the prisoners might make the hall dirty) they were transferred to the military barracks. The rumour quickly spread in the area that Gardelegen had been declared a hospital town and all prisoners there would be handed over to the Americans without a fight. This made even some prisoners who had already escaped come out of hiding and report in to Gardelegen voluntarily.

At the Remonte School the prisoners were put in two big stables and in the open-air riding ring. They received bread and soup, for many the first food since their evacuation from the camps began. The Remonte School commander, Oberstleutnant Hilmar Hubertus Freiherr von Seherr-Thoss, had left for Seethen on the 11th (he was taking most of the school horses there) leaving the Remonte-Schule in charge of Rittmeister Rudolf Kuhn, assisted by Seherr-Thoss's adjutant, Hauptmann Peter Freise.

To make up for the guards that had taken off, the SS convoy commanders again looked for new recruits among the prisoners, asking the ethnic Germans among them to volunteer. Twenty-five stepped forward, not just Germans but also a few Poles, a Czech, etc. Rittmeister Kuhn had them issued with German military uniforms.

Meanwhile, local Party and military leaders were conferring on what to do with the prisoners. To them, the situation was getting acute. The Americans were approaching rapidly and it was only a question of hours before they would reach Gardelegen and liberate the detainees. The Germans were well aware that the concentration camp inmates constituted damning evidence of the Nazis' criminal regime. In their minds, distorted by years of racial ideology, camp inmates were all criminals or subhumans, who needed to be eliminated.

The driving force behind all this was the acting NSDAP-Kreisleiter (Nazi party district leader) of Gardelegen, 34-year-old Gerhard Thiele. In early April, Thiele had attended a meeting at Dessau called by Gauleiter Rudolf Jordan of Gau Magdeburg-Anhalt. On April 6, Thiele himself had called a meeting of the Ortsgruppenleiters and other officials of his Kreis at one of the Spilner restaurants in Gardelegen. Here, he issued an instruction 'on orders of the Gauleiter' that any prisoner who looted, tried to escape, offered resistance or was found wandering without proper papers was to be shot on the spot. Around this time, Thiele mentioned a subject he was to stress over and over again that week until the Volkssturm and many of the people of Gardelegen were well acquainted with it. He told of how the forced workers at Kakerbeck, a village 16 kilometres north of Gardelegen, had escaped before the Americans arrived, looted the homes and raped the women and children. He emphasized that he would not let that happen at Gardelegen. His attempts to alarm the people were successful in that, by the 13th, many believed that while killing the prisoners was horrible, it was necessary for the safety of the town.

Last stop before mass murder. The Remonte-Schule on Bismarker Strasse in Gardelegen, where the various groups of prisoners trekking through Kreis Gardelegen were assembled on April 10-13. A training establishment for cavalry horses, the Remount School had carried out its normal function until right before the prisoners arrived, most of the horses only having been evacuated on April 11.

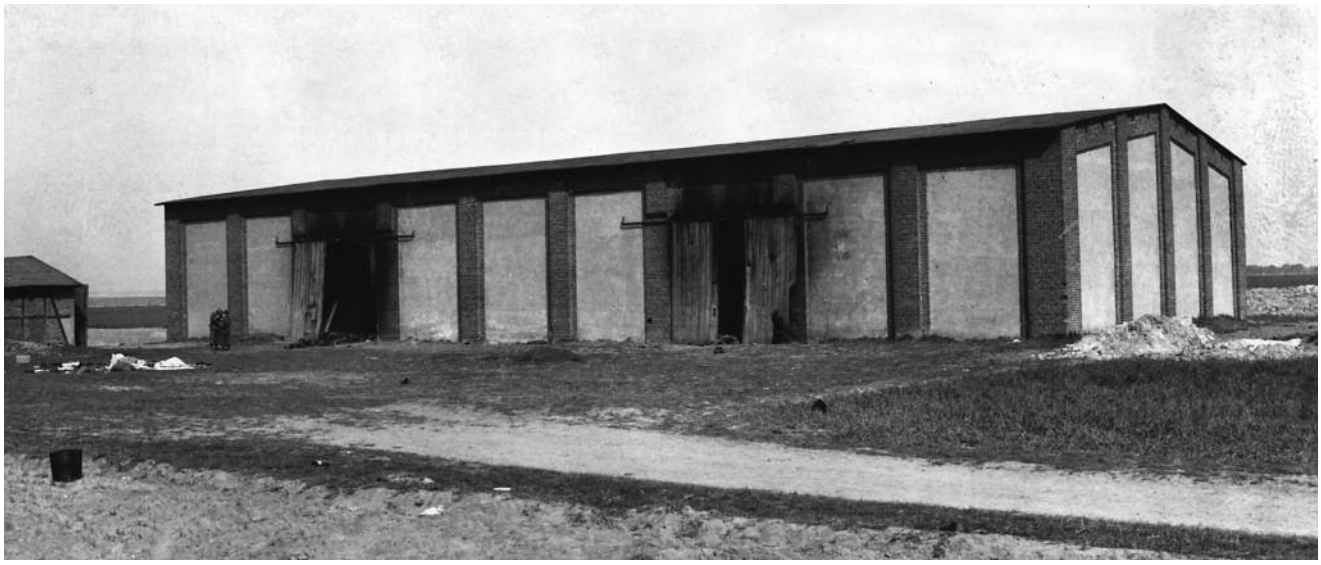
Things came to a head with the arrival, and halt, of the two evacuation trains at Mieste on the 9th and Letzlingen on the 11th. On the 11th, Thiele for the first time voiced his intention to kill all the prisoners then being assembled at the Remonte-Schule. On the 12th, on receiving news of the mass escape at Letzlingen, he issued the order that escaped prisoners were to be hunted down and shot when caught.

During Wednesday the 11th, Thursday the 12th and Friday the 13th there were constant conferences — in person and by telephone — between Thiele and members of his Kreisleitung staff on the one hand; and Rittmeister Kuhn at the Remonte School; the SS convoy commanders Brauny, Locke and Rose, also at the Remonte barracks; the commanders of the two Volkssturm battalions in Kreis Gardelegen, Hans Debrodt and Rudolf Kampe; the Luftwaffe airfield commander, Oberst Walther Milz; and the Fallschirmjäger depot commander, Oberstleutnant Cord von Einem on the other hand. Few of them voiced any protest at Thiele's announcement that all prisoners were to be killed.

His first idea was to shoot them all in the grounds of the Remonte-Schule, but when he told Kuhn and Brauny this about 1730 on the 12th they objected to this because of the school's close proximity to the town. Thiele's next proposal was to kill them all at the Isenschnibber Scheune, the big barn of the Isenschnibbe farm estate which stood isolated on top of a small hill two kilometres north-east of the town. It was a big masonry barn with a tile roof, about 45 metres long, 18 metres wide and seven metres high, with four big double sliding doors, two in either long side. Used for storing the products of the harvest, it was now empty save for a knee-deep covering of straw on the floor.

At 2100, Thiele telephoned Rittmeister Kuhn at the Remonte-Schule and told him to inform Brauny that the prisoners were to be shot at the barn. Kuhn could not find Brauny so he passed the order to the latter's elderly assistant, SS-Hauptscharführer Friedrich Teply, advising him to get the order confirmed in writing. Apparently, Brauny did

Kreisleiter Gerhard Thiele, the man chiefly responsible for the Gardelegen atrocity. Born in Stettin on April 29, 1909, Thiele joined the Nazi party in January 1931. He began work as a teacher in April but was fired in November because of his NSDAP membership. In 1932 he took command of the Deutsche Jungvolk (the predecessor of the Hitlerjugend) in the Finkenwalde district. Reinstated as a teacher after the Nazis came to power in 1933, he switched to the Hitlerjugend rising to become a Bannführer in 1937. In 1937 he became director of the Gebietsführerschule (School for Hitlerjugend Region Leaders) for the Mittelelbe region at Thale in the Harz. He was in the army in 1939-41 and 1942-43 serving in France and Russia and reaching the rank of Oberleutnant der Reserve, returning to the Hitlerjugend School at Thale in between. Recalled from the front as 'indispensable' in April 1943, he attended the NSDAP cadre school at Sonthofen and in May 1944 was appointed acting Kreisleiter of Gardelegen. (MGG)



The Isenschnibbe barn — site of the largest and most-horrific single mass murder of camp prisoners committed by the Nazi regime in the final weeks of the war. This is the southern facade of the building, pictured by US Army photographer Tech/5 Philip R. Mark on April 16, one day after the Americans discovered the atrocity. The 1,050 prisoners had been herded into the barn through the door on the left. The small shed on the left was where the Kapo guards who assisted the SS in the murder action stored the drum of petrol; some of them used it as a place to sleep during the night of the massacre. (USNA)

not like the order and notified Volkssturm battalion commander Debrodt at the Kreisleitung of his reservations. When Thiele telephoned Debrodt from his home around midnight and heard of Brauny's unwillingness, he reacted angrily: 'If the convoy commander won't do it, hang him'.

Throughout the next day — Friday, April 13 — preparations for the massacre continued. At 1100 Debrodt, who was Thiele's most fanatical supporter, telephoned Kuhn at the Remonte-Schule and, on learning that the execution order had still not been carried out, cursed both Kuhn and Brauny for the failure. Brauny was still not available so Debrodt then spoke to Teply and apparently convinced him, for when the SS man laid down the receiver he said to Kuhn: 'It must be done'.

Shortly after, Brauny asked the 25 newly-recruited Kapo guards which of them could handle a rifle. Seven said they could not, and they were told to step out of the group and stay in the barracks. The other 18 were issued with rifles and ammunition. Hauptmann Freise told them they were now free and would get food, schnapps and cigarettes if they would assist with shooting the other prisoners.

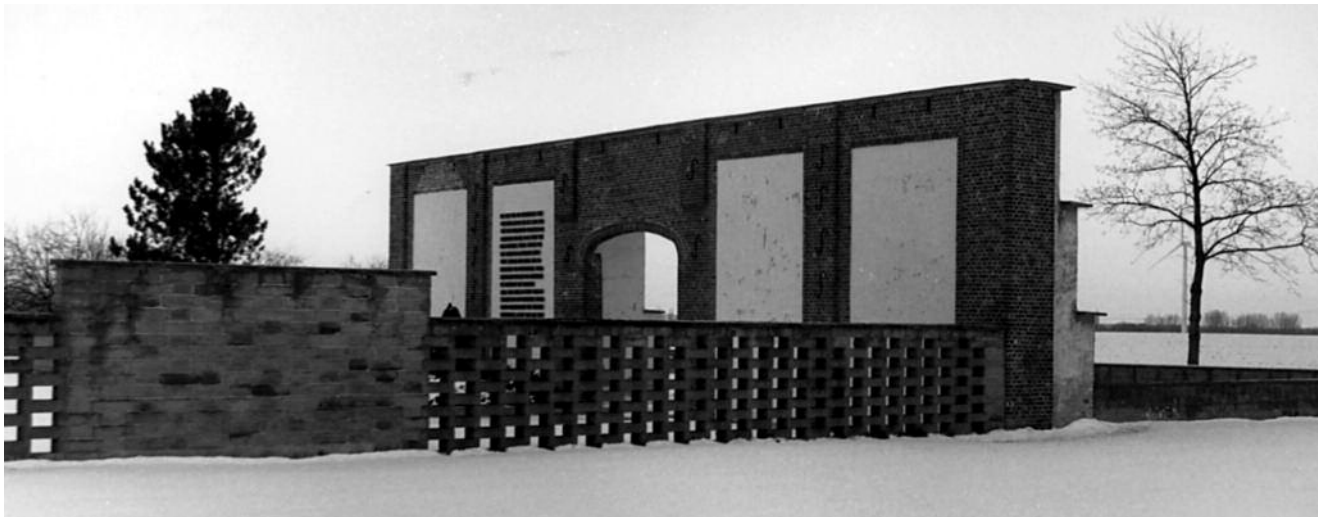
Debrodt called again at 1500 hours, urging Kuhn to take over command of the prisoners, but Kuhn declined saying he had nothing to do with them. About 1630, Walther Pannwitz, one of Debrodt's company commanders, telephoned Kuhn to ask for soldiers to guard and shoot the prisoners. Kuhn replied he had none. Pannwitz then tried Oberst Milz at the airfield, but he too said he had no one available for this task.

About 1600, the guards at the Remonte-Schule formed up the some 1,050 prisoners in groups of 100 and columns of five. Then, in the late afternoon, they marched them out of the gate and up the road to the north in three large groups of about 300. Those too weak to march — about 100 — followed in three carts and trailers drawn by horses and tractors. Somehow, the Germans had assembled some 80 guards: 30 SS men, some of them with dogs; the 18 Kapo guards; half a dozen members of the Volkssturm and of the Reichsarbeitsdienst (Reich Labour Service); and 30 Luftwaffe soldiers from the nearby airfield. The march column was commanded by SS-Hauptscharführer Teply; Transportführer Brauny did not go to the barn (he disappeared from the Remonte-Schule sometime during the 13th); what his colleagues Rose and Locke did is unclear.

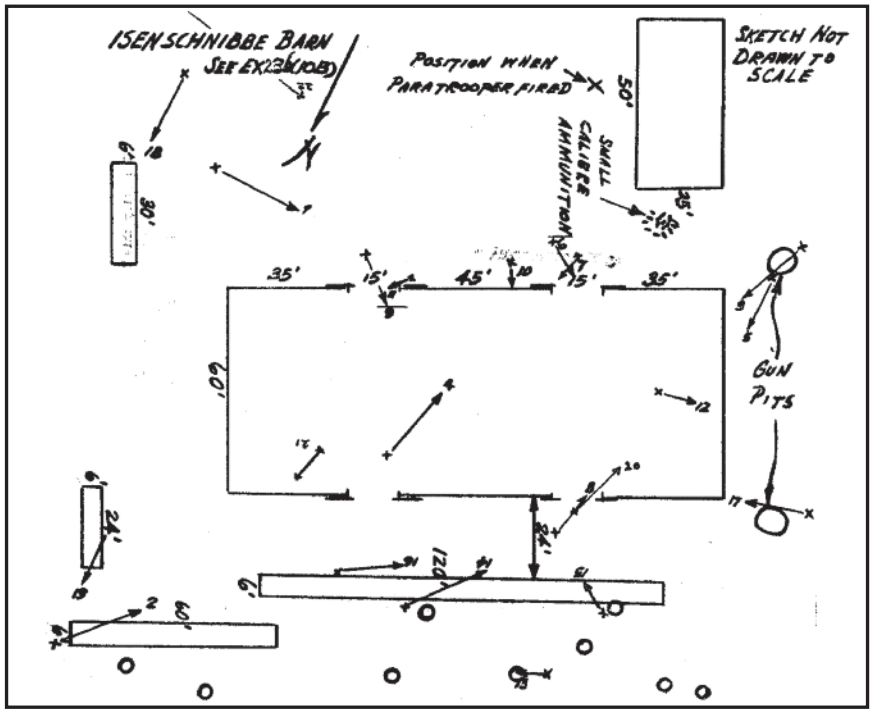
None of the prisoners had any inkling of the fate that awaited them. Rumours had it that they were being marched out to be handed over to the Americans. Guards told some of them that they were going to spend the night in a barn because of lack of space in the barracks.

It was less than two kilometres to the barn. When halfway, the column stopped on the road for about an hour. A tractor passed by with several cans of petrol and a case of ammunition. From afar, prisoners saw some of the load being carried inside the barn.

The last group of 300 arrived at the barn around 1900 hours. It was still daylight. Here, the 80 guards were joined by some 20 Fallschirmjäger, two of them on motorcycles, who arrived carrying Panzerfausts, machine pistols, hand-grenades and flare pistols. The prisoners on foot waited outside the barn for the carts with the sick to arrive, who were put inside first. An Allied aircraft was at that moment circling overhead, so when Unterscharführer Braun (one of the Ilfeld NCOs) ordered the others to move inside as well, many thought it was because of this. As the guards herded them in, a Fallschirmjäger soldier fired his machine pistol into the group to make them move faster, wounding one man. All entered through the south-west door. It was now 2000 hours.



Today only a section of the southern wall of the barn has been preserved as a memorial. (H. Becker)



Sketch of the murder barn prepared by the US Army war crime investigators, showing the spot from where a Fallschirmjäger fired his machine pistol to make the prisoners move into the barn faster; the positions of the two machine guns that covered the doors; the spot near the small shed where a pile of spent ammunition was found; and the four ditches where the Germans buried about half of the victims on the morning after the massacre. The small circles indicate positions where dead prisoners were found who were killed escaping from the barn. The numbered arrows refer to pictures taken by the Signal Corps photographers as exhibits for the case file. Note that the sketch is drawn looking north to south. (NIOD)

Once inside, many immediately noticed the strong smell of petrol, but contented themselves with the thought that the barn must have been used as a garage or to store fuel. The prisoners were ordered to sit down. The four big doors were closed and wedged fast on the outside with stones.

A few minutes later, the door on the south-west side opened and two soldiers entered. One of them — identified as Braun by some — set fire to the straw with a match at several places. As soon as they had gone out, the prisoners rushed up and frantically put out the flames with their blankets, clothes and bare hands. Then they pushed all the straw to the middle of the barn. The soldiers re-entered and again ignited the floor by discharging the signal flares into the straw. Several times, the prisoners managed to put the fires out but finally the soldiers prevented them by throwing hand-grenades, shooting Panzerfausts, and firing machine pistols and rifles into the frantic masses through the south-west door. The men inside reeled back. Others rushed sideways, pressing themselves against the barn wall to find protection against the bullets. A group of some 50 or 60 Russians rushed to the opposite side of the building. The north-west door was broken open and the prisoners started to run out. The Fallschirmjäger mowed them down with machine pistols and rifles. Two machine guns had been placed at the west side of the barn, one covering the northern and one the southern doors. Several of the armed prisoners — notably Kazimierz Drygalski, a Pole, and Adolf August Pinnenkämper, a German — joined in the killing, as did the crew of a nearby Flak battery, Hitlerjugend teenagers led by Wachtmeister Georg Bensch, who came running up with machine pistols.

Soon dead and dying men were piling up at all the doors. Cries of pain and panic rung inside the dark building, as others were trampled. To escape the rain of bullets, some men feigned death or hid under the dead bodies of others. By now the fire was completely out of control. The inside of the barn began to fill up with a suffocating smoke. Chaos and panic was complete. Men were swearing, crying, pleading, praying, shouting 'Vive la France!' and 'Long live Poland!' — several even broke out singing their national anthem. Men were being roasted alive. Human torches ran around until they dropped to the ground dead. Others suffocated or were killed by the exploding hand-grenades and Panzerfausts.

Left: **Bullet-riddled bodies of prisoners piled up against the south-east door. This is where three prisoners — Geza Bondi, Aurel Szobel and Stanislaw Waleszynski — escaped by digging a hole underneath the door. The man on the left tried to crawl out too, but he was shot at close range by one of the guards standing outside — as evidenced by the bullet hole in his right temple. The wooden doors, locked throughout the killing action, were only opened by the Volkssturm the next morning. (NIOD)** *Right:* **The south-east door is the only one left standing today. Careful comparison of the stonework confirms the location. (H. Becker)**

The north side of the barn, where the doors were rammed by the Russian prisoners. The sliding doors were blocked on the outside with stones, but pressure from the men inside caused them to hinge upwards. This created openings left and right through which prisoners ran out, only to be met by a rain of bullets. As far as is known, only three men escaped alive on this side: Mieczystan Kotodzieski and Fedor Dugin through the north-east door after dark, and Stanislaw Majewicz through the north-west one pictured here, after it had been blown open by an exploding hand-grenade. In the foreground is one of the trenches dug by the Volkssturm to bury the victims. (USNA)

Unbelievably, some men managed to survive this holocaust. Mieczystan Kotodzieski, a Pole, was in the barn with his father. They were among those who tried to get out through the north-west door, which the Russians were trying to push open. The father was killed there, but the son got out. However, when he saw a German shooting the men outside with a pistol, he scurried back into the barn. Every time he or others approached the door, the Germans fired. Finally, he went to the north-east door and managed to crawl out there after dark, escaping to the woods in the south-east.

Fedor Dugin, a Russian, also got out through this same north-east door and he too hid in the woods.

By then, the north-west door had been blown open by the exploding hand-grenades. Stanislaw Majewicz, a Pole, escaped through here. His friend Zdzislaw Klipacki, who was running a few metres behind him, was caught by SS men and shot. Majewicz dropped to the ground and lay still, pretending to be dead. Later he managed to creep away.

Another Pole, Wlodzimierz Wozny, dug a hole near the south-west door to get fresh air. He tried to get out, was shot at and ran back. A hand-grenade wounded him above the left hip and in the back. After dark, he tried again. Flat on his belly, he worked his way out, keeping close to the barn wall. Leaping up suddenly, he tried to barge his way through the string of guards. A dog grabbed him. Guards came running, beating him up and firing their rifles, but Wozny shouted in German to stop shooting. The brief confusion allowed him to escape in the dark. He hid in a barn.

Another Pole, Romuald Bak, took advantage of the consternation caused by Wozny's action to make good his own escape. Lying close to where the latter made his bid for freedom, and with the guards in front of him vacating their post to grab Wozny, Bak saw a gap appear in the cordon and, rolling his body on the ground, managed to get through unnoticed.

At least three more men — Witold Modzelewski, a Pole; Dimitri Pietrov, a Russian; and Amaro Castellvi, a Frenchman — crawled out over the bodies through this south-west door, then made for the woods to the east.

Three prisoners — Geza Bondi and Aurel Szobel from Hungary and an unnamed Pole — escaped by digging a hole underneath the south-east door. Scraping away at the door's concrete foundation with a table-spoon and bare hands, they found it consisted only of a thin layer. The stones underneath could be removed by hand. They clawed for an hour before they had an opening big enough. By then it was getting dark so they hoped they could get away unseen. The first to go out was the unnamed Pole. Just as he reached the corner of the building, a guard dog came sniffling by. The Pole tried to simulate death, but the beast howled and a guard came running and shot the man. Szobel and Bondi

Behind the memorial wall a low wall delineates the contours of the barn. (H. Becker)

A close-up of the north-west door, with burned, half-burned and trampled bodies piled up in a heap. One can picture the horror: as one man fell hit, his comrade who followed stumbled and fell over him, those coming behind adding to the heap until it formed a wall of bodies which then further trapped those inside. A few prisoners owed their life to it, using it as shelter against the bullets and flames. Note the bullet marks on the wall. Looking across the inside of the barn, one can also see the hole in the west wall caused by a Panzerfaust being fired right through it. (USNA)

waited until the dog and its master had gone to the other side of the building before crawling out and away through the grain fields, finding refuge in a damaged building near the airfield.

Possibly, the unnamed Pole was Stanislaw Waleszynski; if so, he was not killed. Waleszynski scraped a hole with a tablespoon together with two others (whom he remembered as another Pole and a Frenchman) also underneath the south-east door. All three went through, crawling on their belly to the south-east corner. Waleszynski heard a dog barking, and some Germans shout 'Don't shoot!' at the other end of the barn. (This was again the consternation caused by Wozny's break-out.) With the guards and dogs thus distracted, Waleszynski struck east for the woods.

Boris Mamajow, a Russian, crawled out this same south-east door with another Russian after dark. A German came along with a dog and a flashlight but they were not discovered. After crawling 300 metres, they got up and made for the woods, but here they were discovered by German soldiers who threw hand-grenades at them. Mamajow's comrade was killed and he himself wounded in face and back. He crawled on through the woods for another two kilometres finding a hiding place in a bomb-damaged building.

Yet another Russian, Ivan Matwego, escaped through this south-east door after dark. He was spotted by one of the Kapo guards, Ludwig Juchocki, who hit him with his rifle and told him to go back in the barn. Matwego ran away and, laying himself down, feigned death. As he lay there, he saw Juchocki shoot three other prisoners. Later, he was able to get away.

Several men climbed up one of the barn's wooden support posts to escape the flames, bullets and explosions below. After ascending with a friend, Frenchman Armand Dureux urinated on his woollen cap and held it over his nose against the smoke. He could breathe better air through a hole in the roof. His friend was hit by a bullet and fell down, so he dropped down too to comfort him in his last minutes. After dark, he rushed out through the north-east door. Though struck by a bullet behind the ear, he managed to crawl away unseen, and hide in a barn two kilometres away.

Edward Antoniak, a Pole, held on to a roof beam, but after a few hours, half-fainted from the smoke, fell down too. Shrapnel wounded him in the head. Clambering over masses of charred corpses he made his way to the north-east door. A guard fired at him, so he dropped down, feigning death. After midnight, he sneaked out and escaped.

The south-west door. Despite the hail of bullets fired at it, five men — Wlodzimierz Wozny, Romuald Bak, Witold Modzelewski, Dimitri Pietrov and Amaro Castellvi — managed to escape through here. The corpses lying in the foreground may be in the position where they were shot trying to escape, but more likely they were pulled out of the barn by the Volkssturm when these laboured to cover up the crime afterwards. The man lying on the left has lost a foot, no doubt blown off by one of the hand-grenades thrown into the barn. (USNA)

Left: **The interior of the barn, looking down the long axis toward the west wall. This picture clearly shows the roof support posts up which Armand Dureux and others climbed to escape the flames and bullets. Note the hole in the far left corner caused by the Panzerfausts. Many of the bodies had already been taken out of the barn when this picture was taken. (MGG)** *Right:* **Looking down the empty shell of the roofless barn today. (H. Becker)**

A scene from Dante's Hell. One of the victims still in the position where he collapsed from smoke inhalation after the Germans set fire to the straw on the floor. Picture taken by Sergeant E. R. Allen of the 168th Signal Photo Company on April 16 and approved for release by SHAEF on the 19th. (USNA)

None of the prisoners locked in the barn stood any great chance of survival, but those who stood absolutely no chance at all were the sick, weak and elderly. Numbering about 100, they were brought to the site on horse-cart and trailer and were carried into the barn and put in a corner. Unable to get up or move away from the flames, they burned to death where they lay. Coming two days after the discovery of Nordhausen, and on the same day as the liberation of Bergen-Belsen, Gardelegen received the same massive publicity given to these horror camps, its gruesome images shocking the free world and damning the Nazi regime. (IWM)

These men who got away all stayed in hiding until the arrival of the Americans. Others managed to remain alive in the burning smoke-filled barn. Herman Pranden, a German prisoner, dug a hole in the ground and lay down in it. He fainted during the night, but did not die.

Mieczyslaw Lawnicek, a Pole, crawled up against a pile of dead near the door to find protection against the smoke and flames. Other men who did the same pushed him further and further away until he lay virtually outside the barn. There he remained, just a few metres away from the armed cordon, pretending to be one of the dead. A guard shot at one of the wounded on the pile and this man's blood and brains splattered all over Lawnicek's face. He kept motionless, remaining in this position all night.

Georges Crétin, a Frenchman, crawled to one of the doors to breathe. He saw two of his comrades, Jean Desvignes and Jean Paris, be killed by the bullets trying to get out. Hit in his left thigh, he was buried under the bodies of other men while the deadly flames crept near. Despite a rain of bullets fired at him from the outside, he managed to free himself, taking cover behind a pile of dead. Hours later, withdrawing deeper inside the barn, Crétin lay down among the smouldering corpses and fell asleep.

One of his compatriots, Guy Chamaillard, took shelter under the bodies of men hit. As more men were killed, the pile of corpses grew to a height of five feet. Covered in blood but unhurt, Chamaillard stayed in this position all night without losing consciousness. Later, he too moved away from the door and went to sleep among the corpses.

Eugenius Siradzki, a Pole, kept alive by keeping his mouth to a small hole in the wall near the ground for air, and covering his body with blankets. He fainted, but did not suffocate. He too was completely covered with bodies which protected him against the flames.

Yevgeni Kateba, a Russian, was thrown to the north end of the barn by an exploding hand-grenade and covered by about ten corpses of men killed by the explosions. Unable to move, he remained in this position all night.

Two more Russians — Leonid Maistrov (who had his clothes blown off him by the explosions) and Wasel Momochuk — managed to stay alive, sheltering under the piles of cooling, then calcifying, stinking bodies. The exact total number of prisoners who survived the massacre has never been established but appears to be around 25.

The murder action continued well into the night, with German troops and Kapo guards watching the doors and walls for any escape attempts. In all, some 50 hand-grenades were thrown into the barn. Around 2100 hours, the Fallschirmjäger went back to their depot to get a new supply of ammunition and Panzerfausts. They fired the Panzerfausts into the barn through the west wall and the south-west door. About midnight, the paratroopers received an alert and left.

Shortly after, Kreisleiter Thiele, who had been present from about 2200 (he had been conferring with Oberst Milz at the airfield before that), returned to the Remonte-Schule with Unterscharführer Braun and

Despite the horrible effects of burning, this victim could still be recognised as being of the negro race. The US investigators at first assumed that he might be the only American citizen imprisoned at 'Dora'. Surviving camp inmates interviewed by them spoke of a black prisoner they had met at Rottleberode camp and later at the Remonte-Schule who had claimed to be an American airman shot down over Magdeburg. He spoke English and had the letter 'A' sewn on the left side of his prison coat and on his right trouser leg. At Rottleberode he had worked as a camp doctor. However, some prisoners who themselves spoke English and had talked to the man, found his mastery of the language only fair and guessed he was French-African rather than American. Later investigation revealed that the American who had been a prisoner at 'Dora' had still been alive two weeks after the Gardelegen atrocity. This is one of a series of pictures taken by Pfc Larry R. Darcy of the 168th Signal Photo Company on April 19 under the specific direction of Lieutenant Colonel Edward E. Cruise, the chief investigating officer of the Gardelegen war crime case. (NIOD)

ordered four of the Kapo guards left there (from the seven who had said they could not shoot) to collect a drum of petrol at the Kreisleitung garage and bring it to the barn so as to complete the incineration of the bodies. Once there, the men were told to stay on as guards.

The important thing for the Nazis now was to eradicate any sign of the atrocity that had taken place before the arrival of the Americans. From midnight until about 0230 Thiele and Debrodt were on the phone at the Kreisleitung headquarters, mobilising local organisations to help with burying the dead and clearing up the site.

The first to arrive, at 0430 on April 14, were 50 Volkssturm men from the neighbouring village of Kloster Neuendorf, joined later in the morning by 15 men of the Gardelegen fire brigade, 15 from the Technische Nothilfe (technical emergency service), and 90 from the Gardelegen Volkssturm. In all, some 170 persons were at hand. Few of them had been told beforehand what to expect.

The SS men and armed Kapos were still at the barn doing their dirty work. Thiele, having returned there, ordered all survivors to be shot. Opening the doors and entering the still-smoking building, the SS men and Kapos called out that they were ready to give out medical aid to anyone who was still alive. However, this was a trick, as survivors who made their presence known were killed on the spot with a bullet through the head. This went on until 0830 when the last of the SS men and Kapos returned to Gardelegen.

Meanwhile, the Volkssturm men had begun to dig four grave trenches, two metres wide and two metres deep — two long ones on the north side of the barn and two smaller ones on the east side. Many of the bodies were totally charred, and the workers used hooks and pronged forks to pull individual corpses from the smoking piles of dead. As they worked to empty the building the men found prisoners who had survived the carnage. Some of them were so horribly wounded that they begged to be shot. Hermann Hohls, the Volksturm company commander in charge of the work; Gustav Palis, one of his men; and Paul Schernikau, the fire brigade chief, each shot a prisoner to put him out of his misery.

Geza Bondi, one of the handful of men who survived the massacre, shows US soldiers how he managed to escape, digging a hole underneath the south-east door and crawling away after dark. Bondi, a 38-year-old bank employee and musician from Budapest, Hungary, and a former 1st Lieutenant in the Hungarian Army, had been arrested on November 12, 1944. He was first imprisoned at Flossenbürg concentration camp, later moved to 'Dora', and then to Ilfeld, being put to work making fuel pumps for aircraft. He was in the train to Mieste, and arrived at the Remonte-Schule early on the 12th. After escaping from the barn, he hid for two days, reporting in to the Americans on the 15th. (USNA)

Two Polish survivors tell their stories to Allied war correspondents. Wlodzimierz Wozny (centre), a 22-year-old medical student from Lvov, was arrested in November 1942 for issuing medical unfitness slips to Polish POWs being sent to Germany. He was imprisoned at Lublin, Buchenwald, 'Dora', and finally Wieda, being evacuated with the train to Letzlingen. He escaped through the south-west door by barging his way through a cluster of German guards. Eugenius Siradzki (right), 33, a painter from Sosnowiec, was arrested there in November 1944 for black market activities. He was imprisoned at Myslowice concentration camp before being sent to Gross-Rosen, then 'Dora', then Rottleberode. He remained inside the barn throughout the massacre night and the subsequent cleaning operation by the Volkssturm, not leaving the scene until the morning of the 15th. The GI on the left translating for the Poles could be either Tech/4 Henryk Postrosny of the 327th Engineer Combat Battalion, 102nd Division, or Pfc Emil J. Schirl of the 113th Evacuation Hospital, both of whom acted as sworn-in interpreters for the Poles interviewed by the American war crimes investigators. (IWM)

One of the four known French survivors. Georges Crétin from St Claude was rounded up in February 1943 in a reprisal raid after the killing of a German officer. He was seriously wounded in his left thigh as he tried to break out of the barn, but survived under a pile of bodies. Lying among the hundreds of dead in the centre of the barn, he was not discovered by the other survivors until two days later. He was pictured at the hospital on Gardelegen airfield while recovering from his wounds and the effects of starvation. (IWM)

On April 18, following orders from the Supreme Allied Commander General Eisenhower, the burgomasters and other prominent citizens of Gardelegen and the surrounding villages were brought to the Isenschnibbe barn and made to view the scene of the mass murder. Here Colonel George P. Lynch, the 102nd Division's Chief-of-Staff, tells them what they are about to see. (USNA)

Watched by grim-looking GIs, Colonel Lynch (in foreground) shows the Germans the burial trench near the north-west door, already filling up with ground water. (USNA)

Some of the workers objected to the horrible task and could not stand the shooting and the cries and moans of the wounded. A few of them left the scene in defiance of orders. Schernikau refused Thiele's order to sprinkle the petrol over the corpses, and left at 1000 taking the drum with him. Hohls sent a runner back to the Remonte-Schule to say that the Volkssturm men were unable to shoot the surviving prisoners. The runner came back with an Unteroffizier and five other soldiers. The Unteroffizier shot five prisoners in a most cold-blooded manner. A Russian prisoner who came walking out of the barn naked was grabbed, forced to kneel on the edge of one of the trenches, and killed with a neck shot. Among the piles of dead, the few survivors not yet found — Crétin, Chamaillard, Lawnicek, Siradzki, Kateba, Maistrov, and a handful of others — kept deadly still, knowing that the slightest motion would betray them.

It must be said that not all those that came out of the barn were executed. When two workers grabbed his foot with a hayrack, Wasel Momochuk turned around and said: 'I am not dead'. The Volkssturm men ran away scared and Momochuk followed them out. Though wounded, he was allowed to sit in the sun. Herman Pranden, when he came to, walked out too. They and two other survivors were not harmed but given sandwiches, then put on the fire brigade truck and taken to Jävenitz where they joined the other prisoners that were assembled there.

Only about half of the victims had been buried when, at 1730, the work was broken off because of the approach of American forces.

Around 1700 hours on April 14, the US 102nd Infantry Division reached the town of Gardelegen. The division was advancing eastward from Hannover to Stendal as part of US Ninth Army's grand sweep towards the Elbe. The 2nd Battalion of the 405th Regiment approached the town from the north. After negotiations with the town commander, Oberst Milz, who would only surrender to a full colonel, the German garrison formally capitulated at 1900 hours. Some 500 troops were taken prisoner.

Meanwhile, Chamaillard and the other survivors still languished in the barn. Too weak, too wounded or too dazed to move away from it, they had stayed inside. Three of them — Siradzki, Kateba and Maistrov — hid on the rafters in case the Germans returned. Later they climbed down, warming themselves beside the still-burning corpses, only going to the door to see if anybody was coming. Another night fell. The following morning, April 15, three escaped Russian prisoners of war found the barn. From them, those inside learned of the arrival of the Americans the evening before. Searching the barn, they found Crétin who until then had lain undiscovered among the corpses. The Russians helped the survivors reach the Luftwaffe barracks on the nearby airfield, now in American hands. Here they were given food and medical treatment. A few hours later, the patrol from the 2nd Battalion stumbled on the Isenschnibbe barn by accident, uncovering the atrocity.

The Americans were shocked by the ghastly crime and made sure that it was immediately made known to the world. Over the next few days, dozens of Allied war correspondents, cameramen and photographers visited the barn to report on the atrocity and document the gruesome sight. Numerous American units sent truckloads of GIs to Gardelegen to let them see for themselves the crimes committed by the Nazi regime they were fighting. They explored the barn with wet handkerchiefs pressed to their faces to overcome the awful stench.

The commander of the 102nd Division, Major General Frank A. Keating, ordered that the burgomasters and prominent citizens of Gardelegen and all neighbouring villages be conducted to the barn to see the horrible sight. On April 18, under supervision of divisional troops, the German dignitaries viewed the still-smouldering victims of the mass murder, and were formally charged with telling their communities the sordid tale.

Three of the Germans view the body of a victim inside the barn. (USNA)

Left: **Between April 18-24, all able-bodied men of Gardelegen were compelled to help remove the corpses from the barn and burial trenches and re-inter them. The citizens were ordered to assemble on Marktplatz with spades and shovels. This picture was taken on April 22 when each man was also given a white cross to carry. Picture taken by Tech/5 Josef E. von Stroheim of the 168th Signal Photo Company. (USNA)** *Right:* **The Deutsches Haus on Marktplatz is still an inn today.**

Ready to march off to the Isenschnibbe barn. (USNA)

Marktplatz today, with the Rathaus on the right.

Left: **The column of citizen workers march down the Stendaler Strasse, escorted by a Sherman tank of the 701st Tank Battalion, 102nd Division. The Isenschnibbe barn is up the road on the left, then named the Alte Heerstrasse. (USNA)** *Right:* **The Alte Heerstrasse (Old Army Road) was renamed Strasse der Opfer des Faschismus (Road of the Victims of Fascism) in GDR times. Today one can no longer get to the barn via this route, nor via the other route from Bismarker Strasse, both old roads having been cut by the new bypass road around Gardelegen which was opened in December 2000. To replace them, a new road has been built which leads to the memorial from a point north of the bypass.**

Watched by GIs of the 327th Engineer Combat battalion, the civilians remove the bodies from the long trench on the north side of the barn. Another picture from the series taken by Pfc Darcy under Lieutenant Colonel Cruise's direction on the 19th. (NIOD)

General Keating also directed that every available male citizen of Gardelegen be required to help disinter the victims and give them a proper burial. On the morning of April 18, some 250-300 men assembled on the market square with shovels, spades, bedsheets and pieces of rope. Formed up in columns of five, and escorted by GI guards and Sherman tanks, the civilians were marched to the barn. There, while men of the 327th Engineer Combat Battalion stood by with fixed bayonets, they dug up the dead from the thinly-covered mass graves and carried out the bodies that were still in the barn.

The American guards were in a foul mood and used rifle butts to drive unwilling workers into the barn. The Germans had to move the dead with bare hands and no one was allowed to wear gloves. At one point, there was even a fake execution, a large group of Germans being put against the barn wall and a firing squad of GIs taking aim. Freed camp inmates were brought to the site to point out men they knew to be implicated. The Americans had trouble preventing the former prisoners from lynching those Nazis that were recognised. Freed Polish forced labourers and Russian prisoners of war beat and kicked the Germans and called out to the GIs to kill them all.

The Americans initially decided to bury the victims in common graves and accordingly the German workers began digging seven long trenches just south of the barn on the 18th. However, after two days, the 102nd Division received the order issued by the Supreme Allied Commander, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, that victims of Nazi

The Americans purposely instructed that the citizens in white-collar suits were to carry the corpses — with their bare hands — assigning the task of digging to the others. Ironically, the workers included many who, only a week earlier, as members of the Volkssturm, had dug these same trenches and thrown bodies in them in the last-minute attempt to erase all traces of the atrocity. (NIOD)

After recovery, the bodies were laid out for identification. These ones lie between the two pits to the north-west of the barn — see the sketch on page 14. Picture taken by Pfc Darcy on the 19th. (NIOD)

Two GIs stand silent watch at corpses removed from the smaller pit on the east side of the barn. (NIOD)

Disinterred victims await reburial. In the background the civilians are filling in the emptied long trench to the north of the barn.

Bodies taken from this same trench are laid out along the barn's western wall. (NIOD)

The 102nd Division initially decided to bury the victims in mass graves, ordering the Germans to dig seven parallel trenches just to the south of the barn. This picture is looking east, towards the Luftwaffe airfield which begins immediately beyond the dirt road in the background. (IWM)

atrocities were to be buried in individual graves. So work on the trenches was halted and those victims who had already been buried in them dug up again.

A final resting place was laid out according to the regulations for US military cemeteries about 150 metres south-west of the barn. Lieutenant Colonel William R. Douglas, CO of the 102nd Quartermaster Company, and 1st Lieutenant George A. Carlson of 1st Platoon, 3046th Graves Registration Company, supervised its construction which began on the 21st. The citizens of Gardelegen dug the graves, interred the bodies, erected either a cross or Star of David over each, and surrounded the entire site with a white fence.

On April 22, each man assembled in the town square was in addition given a white wooden cross to carry. The exhumation and burial took until the 24th. A total of 574 corpses were recovered from the grave pits and 442 from the barn — adding up to a total of 1,016 victims. Of these, only 4 could be identified by name, another 301 merely by their prisoner number. The unidentified totalled 711. Nationality could be established of only 186 bodies: among the dead were 60 Poles, 52 Russians, 27 Frenchmen, 17 Hungarians, eight Belgians, five Germans, five Italians, four Czechs, four Yugoslavs, two Dutchmen, one Mexican and one Spaniard. A number of them were Jews. (After the war, a few more victims were identified from the recorded prisoner numbers.)

At the entrance to the cemetery, a big sign was erected with a text in English and German: 'Here lie 1,016 Allied prisoners of war who were murdered by their captors. They were buried by the citizens of Gardelegen, who are charged with the responsibility that these graves are forever kept as green as the memory of these unfortunates will be kept in the hearts of freedom-loving men everywhere.'

Freed prisoners were asked if they could identify victims and also to pick out implicated Germans from among the conscripted workers. Here, a Pole cries out for justice beside the body of a comrade. (IWM)

Below: **Looking from the memorial grounds to the former airfield. (H. Becker)**

Above: **On the 20th a general instruction from SHAEF stipulated that victims of Nazi atrocities were to be buried in individual graves, so work on the mass graves was halted and the civilians were put to work constructing a proper cemetery. Laid out according to the rules for US military cemeteries, the cemetery had four large square plots separated by two crossing lanes. The total number of victims buried in the cemetery was 1,018 — the 1,016 murdered at the barn plus two escaped prisoners from the Letzlingen train who had been caught and executed by members of the Kloster Neuendorf Volkssturm at the Lindenthal forest lodge, just south-west of the town, on April 13. In this picture taken on the 22nd the cemetery is taking shape. While the first rows of graves have already been closed on the left, others are still being worked on. SHAEF had ruled that each victim was to be individually buried by a specified German, whose name was registered at the town hall and whose family was required to maintain that grave in perpetuity. Should the family die out or move away, the burgomaster was responsible for appointing a new caretaker for the grave. This picture by Tech/5 Mark also clearly illustrates how close the Isenschnibbe barn was to Gardelegen town which can be seen in the distance. The Remonte-Schule, where the prisoners were assembled before the massacre, is the tall building standing out between the two spires on the right. The doomed prisoners came marching up the hill to the barn along the tree-lined road on the left. (USNA)** *Below:* **The trees and bushes which have grown up around the cemetery obscure the view today.**

On Wednesday April 25, the entire population of Gardelegen was ordered to attend the formal dedication of the new cemetery. In 1945, the town had a population of 13,000. (USNA)

General Keating ordered that the entire population attend a formal funeral ceremony which was held on the afternoon of April 25. Local families were impressed with the responsibility of forever caring for the graves of these victims of the Nazi regime, each being assigned one grave. To ensure that these instructions would be followed in later years, records were left with the city officials. The divisional Chief-of-Staff, Colonel George P. Lynch, communicated the feelings of his soldiers when he told the townspeople: 'You have lost the respect of the civilised world'.

The Americans immediately started a thorough investigation of the war crime. On April 17, Lieutenant Colonel Edward B. Beale, the Judge Advocate of the 102nd Division, made a preliminary inspection of the murder barn and interviewed a number of freed prisoners at Gardelegen. Between April 19 and May 22, Lieutenant Colonels Edward E. Cruise and William A. Callanan and Captain Samuel G. Weiss, investigating officers of the Ninth Army War Crimes Branch, collected sworn statements from 99 survivors, implicated Germans, and other eyewitnesses. Among those arrested by the Americans were Brauny (discovered in a POW camp) and one SS guard; Debrodt, Hohls, Pannwitz and six other Volkssturm members, Rittmeister Kuhn; Oberstleutnant von Einem; four members of Thiele's Kreisleitung staff; burgomaster Krüger of Mieste; and ten of the Kapo guards. The Germans and Kapos suspected of having actually killed someone were confined at Ninth Army Detention Camp No. 92 at Ziegenhain. Several of the implicated Germans committed suicide before they could be arrested, among them Volkssturm company commander Waldemar Schumm and one of Gardelegen's three Ortsgruppenleiters, Otto Palis.

Colonel Simmons, Protestant chaplain of the Ninth Army, speaks to the assembly at the funeral service. The roof of the murder barn can just be seen on the right above the audience. (USNA)

Taps is sounded, while the Guard of Honour stands by to fire another rifle volley.

On July 1, 1945, in accordance with inter-Allied agreements, the US Army handed over the province of Sachsen-Anhalt, which included Gardelegen, to the Soviet Military Administration. As the scene of crime was now in Soviet hands, it was now up to the Soviets to pursue the matter. A year later, on July 25, 1946, the Americans turned 21 of the implicated men over to the Russian authorities, together with a copy volume of all their documentation on the case, and on August 6, the US Army formally closed their own file. The Soviets sentenced most of the 21 to long years of incarceration or assigned them to long internment in one of their 'special camps' in Germany.

One man was not handed over to the Russians. Erhard Brauny was tried at the Nordhausen War Crime Trial which was held before the US Military Court at Dachau in 1947. He was sentenced to life, probably only escaping a death sentence because he convinced the judges that he had not been present at the barn when the murder action took place. He died from cancer in Landsberg prison on June 16, 1950. Brauny's assistant, Friedrich Teply, was a witness at Brauny's trial but he was never tried for his own part in the massacre. None of the other implicated SS commanders — Rose, Locke or Braun — were ever found or tried.

Kreisleiter Gerhard Thiele, the man chiefly responsible for the murder action, was never apprehended. Thiele fled from Gardelegen at 1800 on April 14. The day before, Major Stobbe, the chief of the local Wehrmeldeamt (recruiting office), had provided him with a Wehrmacht identity card and paybook with false personalia. Thiele was last seen saying goodbye to his wife outside his home on Stendalerstrasse 89 and wearing a civilian suit instead of his usual Party costume. His wife was interrogated, but disclosed nothing (she lived in the GDR until her death). Persistent rumours that Thiele had found refuge in the Western Zones, later the German Federal Republic, led prosecution offices in both East and West to begin investigations into his case in the 1960s, none of them with any official result. Only in 1997, after reunification, was the Sachsen-Anhalt criminal police finally able to confirm the rumours. Thiele had been in the West since 1947, living under a false name in Düsseldorf from 1951 until his death as an 85-year-old pensioner on June 30, 1994.

Despite East-West relations deteriorating into the Cold War, work brigades of local firms and factories kept the cemetery at Gardelegen in perfect order. This practice continued after Gardelegen became part of East Germany in 1948. In September that year, the remains of 34 dead of French nationality were exhumed and transferred to the French National Cemetery at Tegel in the French sector of Berlin. (When this cemetery was dissolved in 1951-52, most of the 34 were repatriated to France.)

The sign put up by the 102nd Division at the entrance to the cemetery. (MGG)

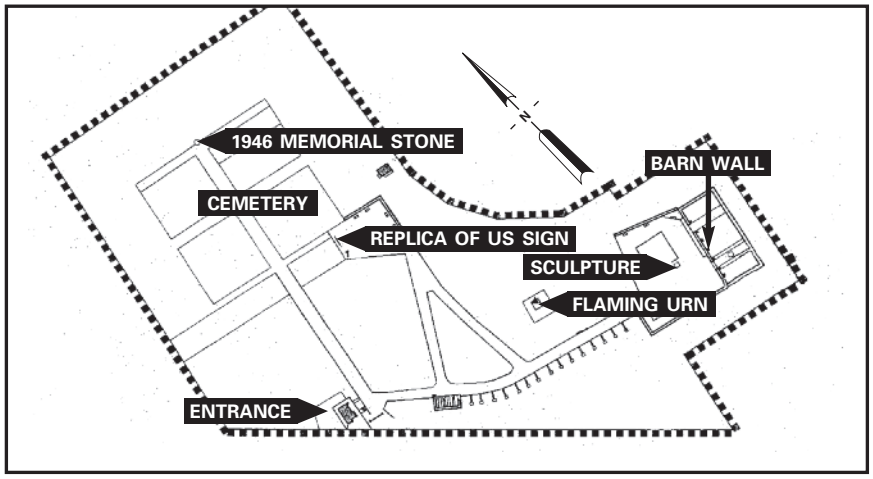
In 1953, the massacre site was made an official memorial by the East German authorities, one section of the barn wall being preserved. Text and sculpture were added later.

With the scarcity of building materials in the immediate post-war years, bricks and tiles from the burned-out Isenschnibbe barn were carried off to be re-used elsewhere. In 1950, work began to turn what remained of the building into a memorial. Part of its front wall was renovated, a text added to it, and bushes were planted. The new memorial, formally dedicated in April 1953, became a venue for Party and State ceremonies. A permanent exhibition on its historical background was opened in the Gardelegen town museum in 1963. In 1965, as an additional reminder of what had happened in the region, the routes of the death marches to Gardelegen were indicated by stone markers. That same year — as a gesture of political protest against the US involvement in the Vietnam War — the big sign erected by the Americans at the cemetery was taken down.

In 1970, the status of the massacre memorial was raised to that of a regional Mahn- und Gedenkstätte (Remembrance and Memorial Site). It was re-landscaped according to the strict guidelines laid out for all East German memorials, with flag-poles, flaming urns and a speaker platform. A bronze sculpture by Jochen Sendler was added in 1971. Even more than before, the site became a place for state-organised, anti-Fascist mass meetings.

Five Polish survivors of Gardelegen during a visit to the cemetery on April 13, 1965, the 20th commemoration of the massacre. L-R: Tadeusz Moderski, who evaded during the march from Mieste to Gardelegen, thus escaping the massacre; Edward Antoniak, who reputedly escaped from the barn after climbing up into the rafters; Witold Modzelewski, another escapee from the barn; Josef Pamuta, one of the prisoners who volunteered to act as armed guard during the massacre (as there had been no evidence that Pamuta had actually killed anyone, no charges had been brought against him in 1945. When he showed up in Gardelegen in 1965, nothing of all this was known locally, and Pamuta was able to pose and get fêted as a survivor from inside the barn. Antoniak, who introduced him, must have known the truth but, for some reason, chose to say nothing); and Franek Krawczyk, who escaped at Letzlingen. (MGG)

Left: **The American sign erected at the cemetery in 1945 was removed by the East German authorities in 1965 and unceremoniously re-used as part of the wall of a shed in the communal cemetery, something which few people outside the cemetery workers knew. It was only after this picture, taken illegally by a young East German, Karl-Heinz Reuschel, reached the US and was published there — and then brought to the notice of the East German authorities by their embassy — that action was undertaken. Fearing an international uproar, the GDR authorities ordered that the sign be replaced at the cemetery but when it was extracted it was found to have badly deteriorated. The original was put in store at the town museum while the authorities ordered a replica to be made. However, wood and paint had to be allocated and the fall of the GDR came before the duplicate was ready. (K. H. Reuschel)** *Right:* **The replacement was finally put up in 1990.**



The memorial site today. (MGG)

Another GDR legacy: stone markers still mark the route of the main death march from Mieste to Gardelegen via Zichtau. The red triangle was worn by political prisoners in Nazi concentration camps.

All this ended with the demise of the GDR in 1989. One surprise after reunification was the discovery of the original sign put up at the cemetery by the Americans. After it was taken down in 1965, it had been stored away at the town cemetery. It was later used as a side wall of an open tool shed and so survived through the years. When a secretly-taken picture of it surfaced in the West in 1988, the GDR authorities, fearing a scandal, ordered it to be re-erected. However, the sign was in poor condition, so plans were made to replace it with a replica instead. Reunification came before this materialised and the replica was not finally erected near the original spot until 1990. The original sign is now safely stored at the town museum.

Since 1989 the Gardelegen Memorial, like the other sites dedicated to the memory of victims of Nazism in former East Germany, have worked to correct the one-sided political slant of the information available to visitors. In 1991, the exhibition in the town museum was closed. New information tables were erected at the memorial itself in 1995, but plans for a new documentation centre to be built there were shelved in 1999. Today, authority over the memorial lies with Gardelegen municipality, with financial support from the province of Sachsen-Anhalt.

On April 13, 2000 — the 55th commemoration of the massacre — a delegation of veterans of the 102nd 'Ozark' Division presented a bronze plaque 'to the citizens of Gardelegen who have observed and supported General Keating's directive of 1945'. The plaque text continues: 'May this memorial be a "cry for freedom and peace" by the victims of this massacre, their homelands and our two countries'. L-R: Frau Hannelore von Baehr, mayoress of Gardelegen; Sylvia Henk, interpreter; Ernest Smith and Jim Hansen, presenting the plaque on behalf of the Ozark veterans. Jim Hansen was the lieutenant leading the patrol which first discovered the barn on April 15, 1945. (MGG)

DESTROYING THE HAMBURG U-BOAT PENS

By Dr Jan Heitmann

Twice within a quarter of a century, German U-Boats attacked Britain's sea communications with every means in their power and each time they nearly succeeded in bringing their enemy's seaborne trade to a standstill. During World War I, the submarine established itself as a major weapon of war, capable not only of inflicting severe damage to shipping, but also of totally altering the strategic situation. Britain nearly suffered defeat from the German submarine campaign. World War II showed that the U-Boat had lost none of its deadliness. By the outbreak of war, each of the major navies had formulated a submarine strategy which clearly affected their design within that navy. However, Germany alone had developed the military and strategic use of submarines in mercantile warfare to a high degree. A plan was immediately put into action in which the share of surface ships was drastically reduced in favour of U-Boats. Although Allied counter-measures temporarily got the upper hand against the U-Boats in 1943, new technologies came close to restoring the balance in their favour two years later. The U-Boats remained dangerous for the rest of the war but were never the threat that they had been. However, just like in the Great War, the U-Boats nearly brought the United Kingdom to its knees and post-war evidence was to show how narrow the Allied margin of victory had been.

One of the major conditions for success in the Battle of the Atlantic was the creation of submarine bases near to the operational sectors. As early as June 1940, the retreat of the French and British armies gave the Kriegsmarine the opportunity to use the French Atlantic ports and to leave at last the shallow waters of the North Sea and the dead end to which they had been confined. Between 1941 and 1943, five large U-Boat bases were constructed: at Lorient, Brest, St Nazaire, La Pallice and Bordeaux (see *After the Battle* No. 55). At Brest and Lorient, the bases were installed in or near the naval dockyard while at St Nazaire, La Pallice and Bordeaux they were in the commercial port basins. Thus, some 450 nautical miles were cut from the return journey, allowing an extension of the unrestricted submarine warfare employed in the Great War.

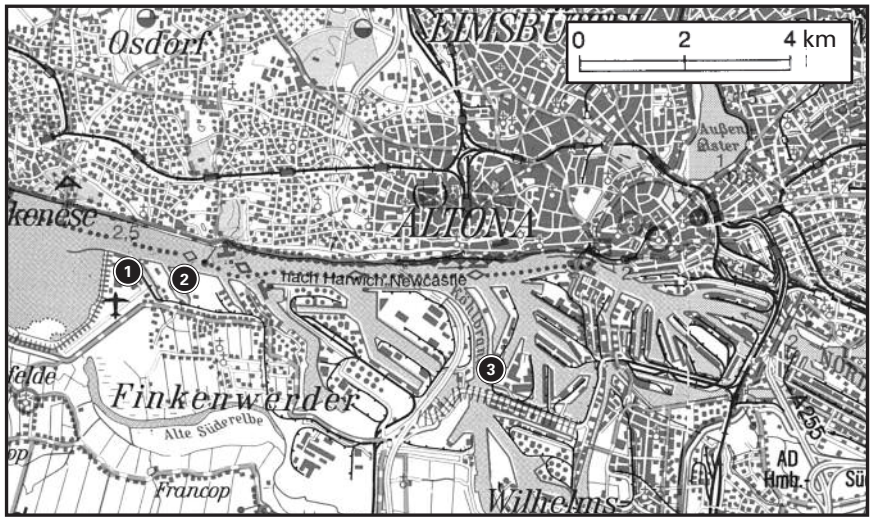
The British responded at once. First Brest, then Lorient saw the start of a long series of bombing raids which also greatly affected the civilian population, and the Germans soon realised the need to build shelters for personnel and equipment. To effectively protect the submarines themselves, it was necessary to produce solid bunkers. Experiments with these had been carried out by the Organisation Todt, under the direction of the Kriegsmarine, on the island of Heligoland at the Nordsee-Bunker there, which had six submarine pens.

The Hamburg pens had the same general layout as the U-Boat bunkers in France and Norway, although the length and width varied according to function. While those in France and Norway served as operational bases, the Hamburg shelters were only designated for the final equipping, maintenance, refuelling and repair of submarines. They were provided with a number of pens built side by side at the water's edge and a service area to the rear divided up to provide for repair shops, supply and storage rooms, workshops, power plants, fire-fighting and first aid posts, offices and living quarters. Between the backs of the pens and the rear area, a passage with a railway line running along it spanned the width of the bunker with armoured doors at either side. There were numerous doorways for personnel and larger ones for vehicles at the back.

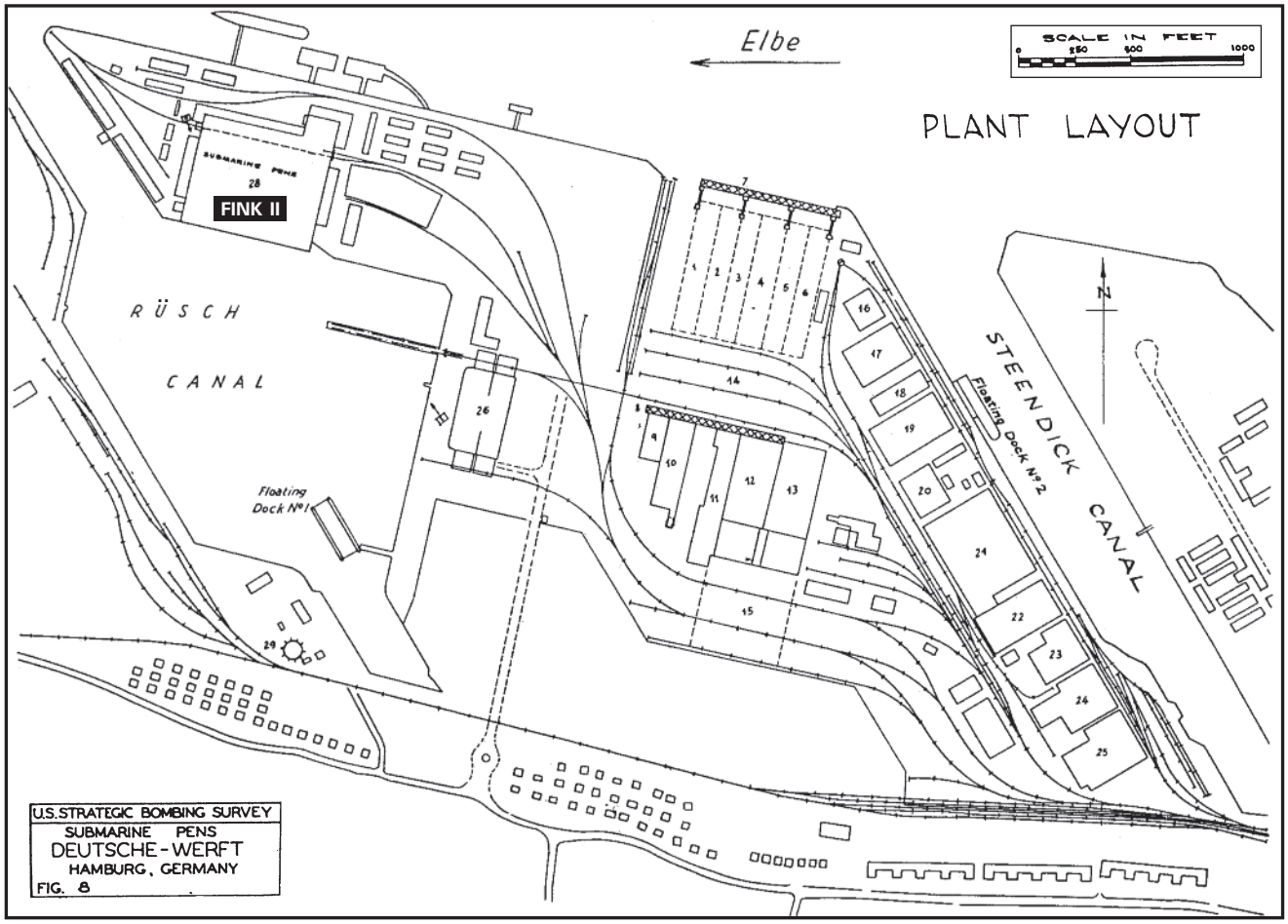
Top: **The first U-Boat pen built in Hamburg was erected on land occupied by the Deutsche Werft shipyard in the Finkenwerder suburb of Hamburg. Known by the Kriegsmarine as 'Fink II', it was situated on a peninsula of land on the south bank of the northern Elbe river to the west of the city centre. (UBA)** *Above:* **The second shelter, known as 'Elbe II', was located at the end of the basin of the Vulkanhafen in the Steinwerder area of Hamburg docks.**

The accelerated construction of the U-Boat pens at Hamburg was a direct result of the bombing of the sheltered U-Boat bases in France. The concentration of U-Boats in that country invited heavy bombing and the pens received several direct hits in late 1944 but only superficial damage was caused to the roofs which consisted of two layers of reinforced concrete, approximately 3.50m thick, beneath a burster course of between 2.10 and 3.80m. Only at Brest, where the roof at the time of the raid had no burster course, was it partially penetrated. The U-Boats in the bunkers however were unaffected and only slight damage was sustained to the internal equipment. German specialists who inspected the shelter after the raid, considered that, given a burster course, the roof would have withstood the heaviest bombs then known to exist. The air attacks on the Biscay bunkers, in which all unprotected equipment was completely destroyed, confirmed the vital importance of U-Boat bunkers, and their inspection yielded valuable information, which was at once applied to the design of U-Boat and dockyard bunkers then under construction in Germany.

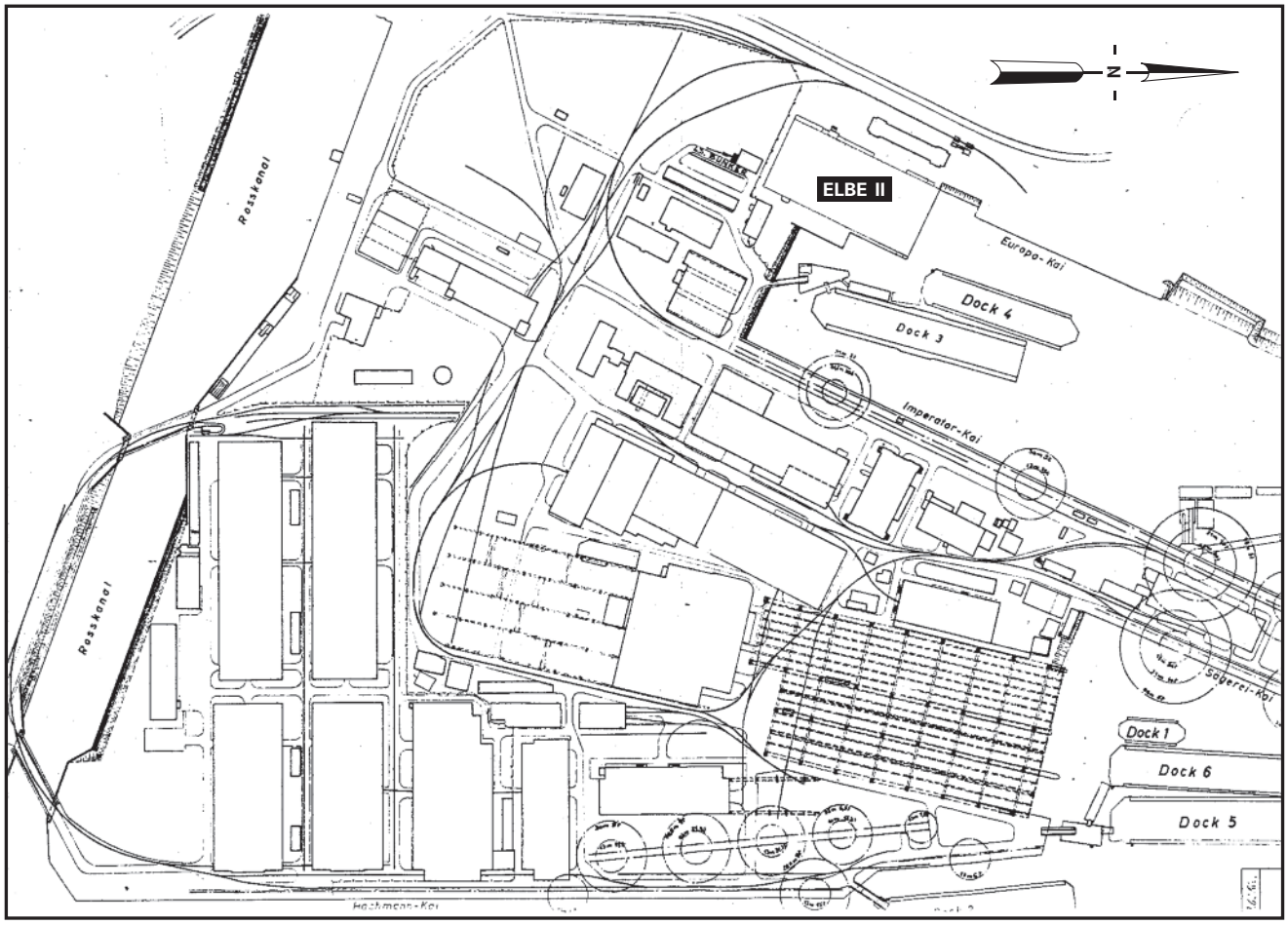
The construction of the first Hamburg U-Boat bunker, code-named Fink II, was ordered by Kriegsmarine headquarters in late 1940. Designed to accommodate 15 U-Boats, they were the largest U-Boat pens in Germany. An agency named the Sonderbauleitung (special building directorate) representing the Kriegsmarine construction department was set up in Hamburg to oversee this and future building projects for the navy. This office arranged that design and construction of the pens were to be carried out jointly by the firms of Wayss & Freytag AG and Beton & Monierbau AG. It was also arranged that the pens should be built on a part of the Deutsche Werft shipyard in the Finkenwerder suburb of Hamburg and would be operated by the latter for and under the direction of the Kriegsmarine. After a series of tentative plans had been prepared by the two construction companies and discussed with representatives of the Kriegsmarine building department, a satisfactory design was eventually agreed. Only two pens were planned at first, construction of which began in March 1941 and was completed in October. However, even before these were ready, it was decided to extend the structure by adding two more pens which were finished in October 1942. At about this time it was decided to construct a fifth pen and this was completed in April 1944.



Fink I [1] was the designation of the submarine base on the Ness Canal which was the home of a training flotilla and also the location of the Blohm & Voss seaplane factory. [2] The Fink II U-Boat Pens. [3] Elbe II.



The Fink II pens were located on the tip of the area forming the northern bank of the Rüsch Canal, which itself was considerably widened in the course of construction of the pens to provide a basin of sufficient size. [1-6] Slips. [7-8] Gantries for rope conveyors. [9] Welding shop. [10] Platers shop. [11] Mould loft. [12-13] Assembly shops. [14-15] Stores dumps. [16-21] Joiners shops, saw mill, riggers loft, plumbers shop, rope shop, engineers, fitters shops. [22-25] Assembly shops. [26] Heavy assembly shop. [27] Timber store. [28] U-Boat shelters. [29] Wet gasholder.



Elbe II, some 3¾ miles to the east, lay within the Howaldtswerke shipyard and the MAN engine works, both of great importance to the German war economy.

The design of the other Hamburg U-Boat bunker, Elbe II, was nearly identical to that of the original specifications for Fink II but, due to the confined situation in the Vulkanhafen, its size was limited to only two pens, each designated to accommodate three U-Boats. Work started in December 1940 and was carried out by Dyckerhoff & Widmann AG under the surveillance of Professor Agatz, a famous dock architect. It took only one year to finish the bunker, the structure resting on 2,500 piles.

By mid-1942, U-Boats could scarcely show themselves during the day, so that only at night could they come up to take advantage of their superior surface speed and charge their batteries. However, soon they could not even do so at night in areas covered by Allied airborne radar. By the end of the year, U-Boat losses had increased alarmingly, vessels with both experienced and inexperienced crews failing to return for causes unknown. U-Boat Command held the submarines at their bases as the first hint of new enemy counter-measures came from reports of vessels which had been subjected to attacks by planes on nights of zero visibility. The Allies had developed radio-locating devices similar to those already used by the Germans and had equipped their aircraft with them. The U-Boats were thus driven under water even at night in patrolled areas, thus greatly reducing their effectiveness. German engineers saw a way of meeting the demand for increased submerged radius and speed by increasing the electrical capacity of the batteries and the effectiveness of the driving motors, as well as designing a submarine particularly suited to rapid underwater movement.

This project led to the development of the Types XXI and XXIII which emerged as the most-sophisticated submarines of their time. Power plants had been developed which then made possible a new type of attack. Equipped with the Schnorchel breathing tube which enabled them to use their diesel engines even when submerged, these U-Boats were able to operate entirely under water. Both in attack and in subsequent escape manoeuvres, they could make underwater speeds twice as high as those formerly attained. The Type XXI Elektroboot was a fundamentally new class with a streamlined hull and very powerful batteries designed for a high submerged speed. These characteristics set it far ahead of all other submarines of that period. The design was first suggested by the leading U-Boat constructors at a conference in Paris in November 1942 between Admiral Karl Dönitz, the Befehlshaber der U-Boote (Commander of the U-Boat Fleet), and officials of the Naval Construction Office, the engineers emphasising that a boat of 1,600 tons would be required to house the huge batteries.

Dönitz proposed that the new boats be fabricated in sections at inland factories and then assembled and launched at yards with shipbuilding experience. Such prefabrication would bring new plants into submarine construction, and permit drawing on a larger labour pool, while reducing the effect of bombing by decentralisation. Production could be speeded up by using assembly-line methods in specialised plants and by reducing the time each boat spent on the slipways.

The hull of the new type was divided into eight sections — one section to a compartment — plus conning tower and superstructure which were produced separately in 13

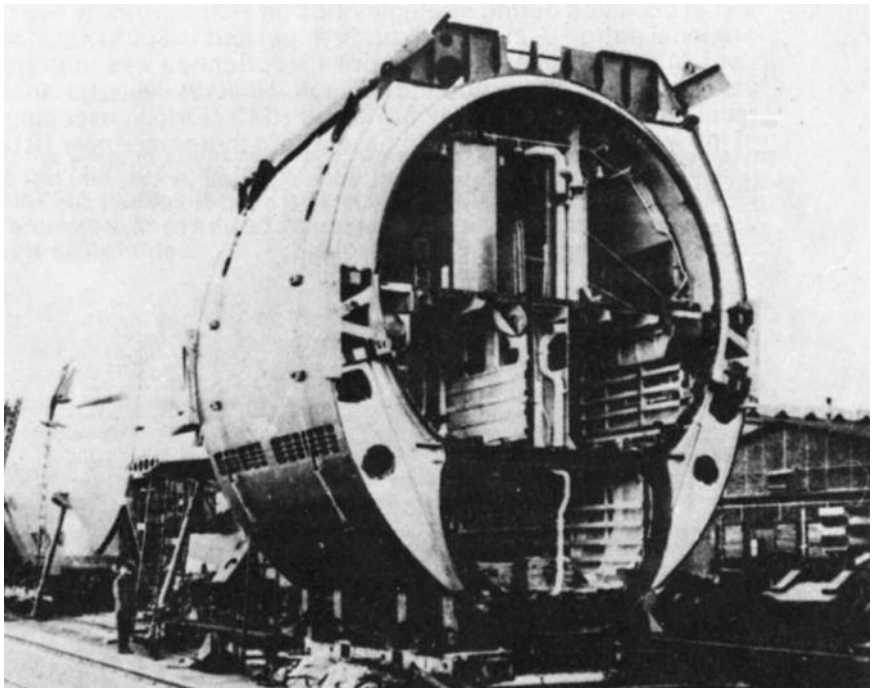
different yards and then assembled. This allowed duplication and ensured that if a number of sections were destroyed in one yard a corresponding number of U-Boats would not be lost. The building of the pressure hull of the single section, the installation of watertight bulkheads and the bottom plate was allotted to steel works inland. Here, the steel plates were cut and shaped, then welded into the basic sections. Large foundations and hull fittings were also installed during this phase.

From these factories the sections were then transported by road and inland waterways to the so-called section yards. The latter had to effect complete installation of main and auxiliary engines, communication systems, conduits and electric wiring. The prepared sections were then transported to the assembly yards where the submarines were put together. Power trials and the delivery of the completed boat were carried out here as well. In view of the disruptions by air raids and the traffic situation, three assembly plants were set up for Type XXI and, of the 33 boats to be delivered per month, eight were assigned to the Schichau yard at Danzig, 13 to Blohm & Voss at Hamburg and 12 to AG Weser at Bremen.

In view of the deteriorating military situation, the timetable for the production of the Type XXI boats was set very tight. Theoretical calculations were begun in January 1943, and the preliminary design was completed by June. At a conference in early July, Dönitz reported the completion of the design and urged that building should be given the highest priority. Hitler agreed and approved the adoption of the Type XXI and immediate proposals for its mass production were made and contracts were placed for 360 Type XXI U-Boats.

The Hamburg U-Boat pens played an important role in the construction of the Type XXI U-Boat, when production of this came into full swing.

The first Type XXI to come off the production line was *U-2501* and, although launched as planned in the spring of 1944, she was not commissioned until June 27. Commanded by Oberleutnant zur See Otto Hübschen, she was assigned to the 31. U-Flottille, a training flotilla, and used as a trial and training boat. (Her short life was to end only nine months later in the Elbe II pen in Hamburg.) By August 1, 12 months after the award of contracts and the beginning of unit construction, another eight Type XXIs had been delivered and production at the yards was in full progress. By the end of October, 32 boats had been commissioned, while those under construction in the assembly yards were so far advanced that, despite considerable interruption through bombing, a monthly delivery rate of 15 to 20 Type XXIs could be expected in the immediate future.



More than twice the size of the U-Boats they replaced (the Type VIIs), the Type XXI was manufactured in eight sections having a total length of 76.70 metres and an overall diameter of 6.60 metres — over 21 feet. The smaller lower compartment was used for fuel storage (250 tons) and the batteries containing 236 tons of acid. This gave the diesels (2 x 2000hp) a maximum range of 15,500 nautical miles, with an underwater radius of 340 miles at five knots or 30 miles at 15 knots.

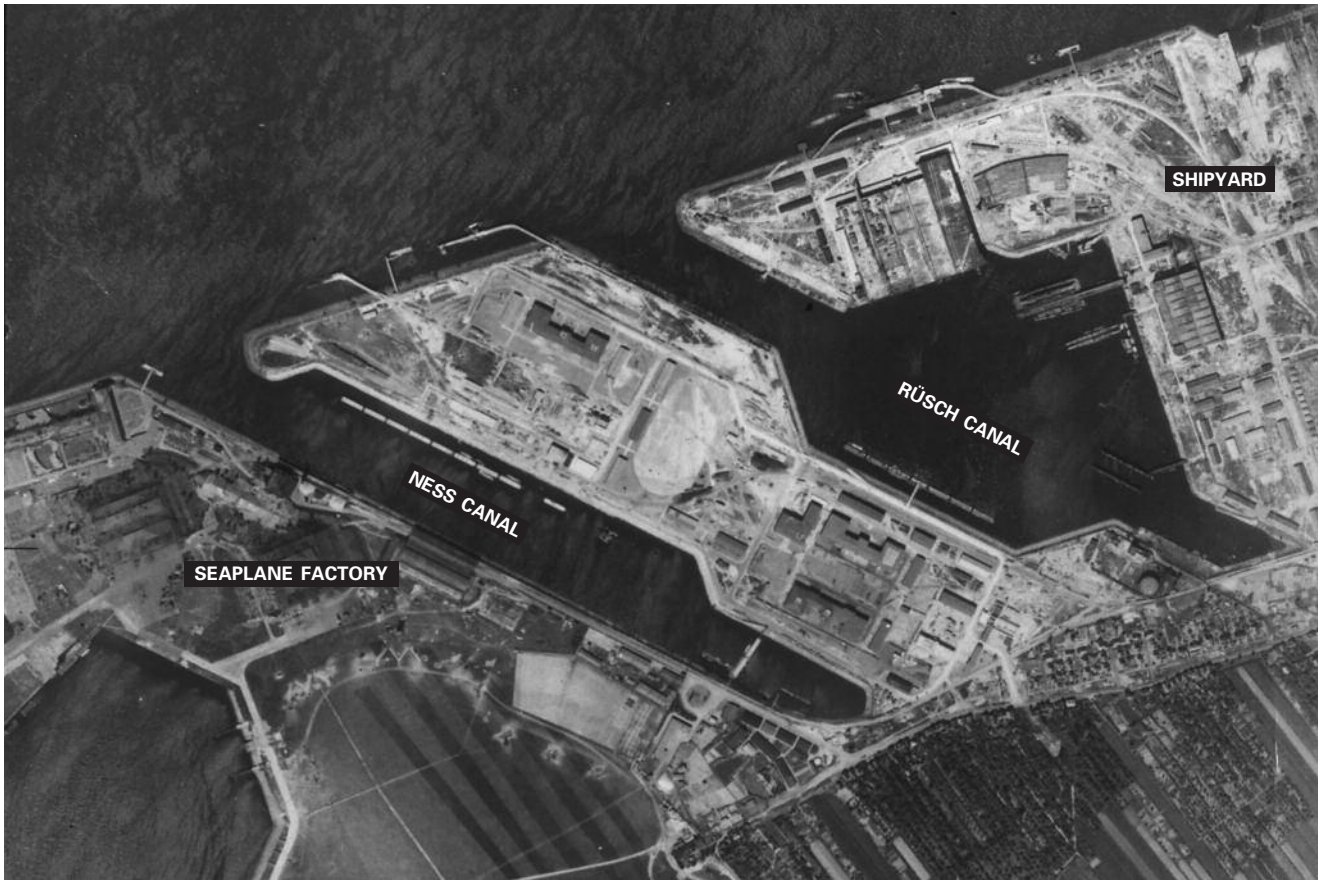
It was Dönitz's intention to use a few of these boats to resume the battle both in the Atlantic and in remote areas over the coming four months, later placing an increasing number to the west of the British Isles (Their size rendered the boats unsuitable for work in the North Sea and other shallow-water areas.) By virtue of its great endurance, the Type XXI could reach any part of the Atlantic and remain there for up to six weeks. It could, in fact, have just made the passage to Cape Town and back without refuelling.

The marked deterioration of the overall military situation for Germany in the final months of the war did not affect Dönitz's plans to continue the U-Boat campaign. With the French Atlantic bases no longer in the Kriegsmarine's possession, U-Boat operations were continued from Norway. Since the bases there had insufficient accommodations, a few home ports were also used, but operational possibilities were consequently limited. However, really effective offensive U-Boat action was only possible using the new type. From February 1945 onwards, the Kriegsmarine began to feel the effect of the gradual severance of northern Germany from the industrial interior. Oil and coal — the most important of all commodities required by the navy, dockyards and other supporting services — no longer arrived. As a result of the Russian advance, work stopped at the Schichau and Danzig yards as early as February and thereafter gradually came to a standstill in the remaining Baltic and north German ports where work was undertaken only on those Type XXI boats that had already completed their training. U-Boats used for training were switched into operational vessels in the effort to get the first Type XXIs to sea.

The new Type XXI could dive in 18 seconds and was certified for 250 metres although it could probably go down to 500 metres. It was armed with six torpedo tubes and two 2cm twin AA guns in streamlined mountings. Crew was five officers and 52 men. The introduction of the new submarine was painfully slow and in the end those boats allocated to training had to be switched to operations. Only two Type XXIs actually saw service: *U-2511* (Korvettenkapitän Adalbert Schnee) and *U-3008* (Korvettenkapitän Helmut Manseck). *Above:* This was the first one off the slips — the *U-2501*. (UBA)

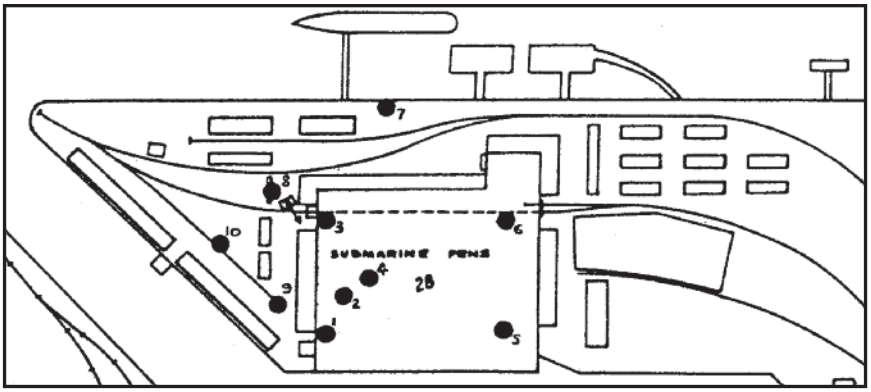
Hamburg had suffered grievously in the firestorm raids of 1943 (see *After the Battle* No. 70) but the attacks had been concentrated on the city rather than the port installations south of the river. Between August 1943 and May 1945 Hamburg was attacked on another 70 occasions but not until the night of March 8/9, 1945 were the U-Boat bunkers singled out for special attention. These two comparison pictures of Elbe II were taken on June 19, 1944 *(left)* **and April 9, 1945** *(right)***. The whole dock area is pitted with craters yet only the buildings on the roof of the pen were damaged** *(below)***. This picture was taken on May 3, 1945. Visible in front of the pen is the conning tower of *U-2501*.**

During all this time, the Hamburg U-Boat pens proved their worth. Over the preceding months, the pens and submarine yards had only suffered isolated bombing but now attacks were specifically directed against them. On March 8/9, 1945, RAF Bomber Command raided the dock area when 312 aircraft dropped 983 tons of bombs, inflicting heavy damage upon the Blohm & Voss shipyard and destroying two U-Boats at the Howaldtswerke yard. Then on March 20, a token force of 13 B-17s of the Eighth Air Force executed a very effective daytime raid. On March 31, Bomber Command returned with 469 aircraft which dropped 2,217 tons which caused severe damage to the Howaldtswerke installations, including the unprotected U-Boats. The area again fell victim to British bombs on April 8/9 when 440 bombers dropped 1,481 tons, and again the next day when 1,571 tons were dropped. During all these attacks, the massive Elbe II bunker provided maximum shelter while the light structures on top of the pens as well as buildings, installations and unprotected equipment in the neighbourhood were subject to destruction.

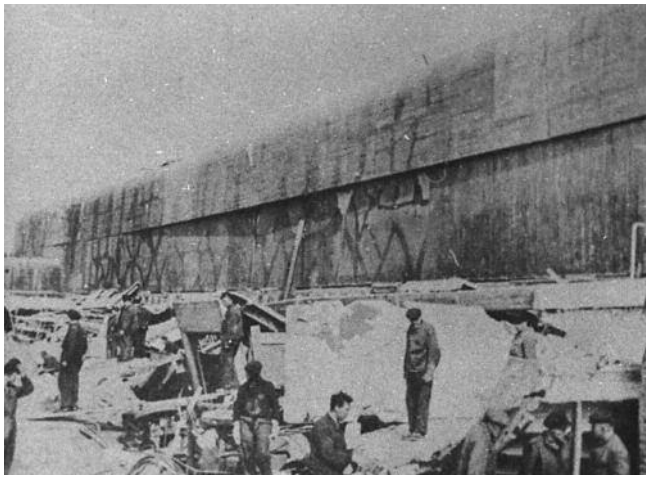


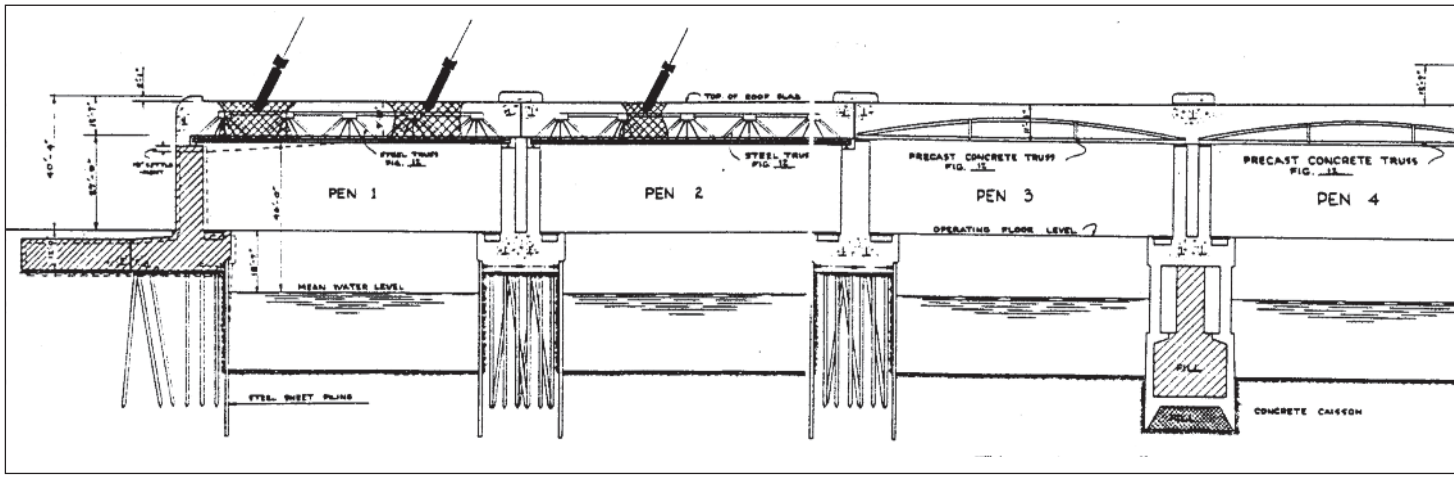
The Fink II pens were the primary target on two raids. Each time the bunker was easily recognised by its massive bulk and general shape as well as by it being the single dominating feature in an otherwise rural suburb of Hamburg. On April 4, the Eighth Air Force dropped 44 4,500-lb rocket-assisted, armour-piercing Disney bombs on Fink II, but these failed to have any effect on the target. Then on April 9, 17 Lancasters came in on a south-easterly course over the target at an altitude of approximately 12,000 feet and dropped 15 five-ton Tallboys and two ten-ton Grand Slams on the shelter, fused at between 25 and 30 seconds. Of the 17 bombs dropped, six hit the target, one struck sufficiently near to cause serious damage, and three fell between 130 and 300 feet from it, leaving huge craters, blowing flat or damaging barracks, boilerhouses, store-houses, workshops, toolshops and a large ship that was anchored beside a jetty parallel to the river bank. Two other bombs were believed to have fallen in the water. There is no record of the five remaining bombs.

Above: **Fink II photographed by the US 7th Photo Group on June 19, 1944.** *Below:* **The Tallboy/Grand Slam hits of April 8/9, 1945.**



Below left: **This is crater No. 7 on the edge of the northern quay behind the pen, the corner of which can be seen on the left.** *Below right:* **The massive western wall of Fink II, displaced by hit No. 9.**

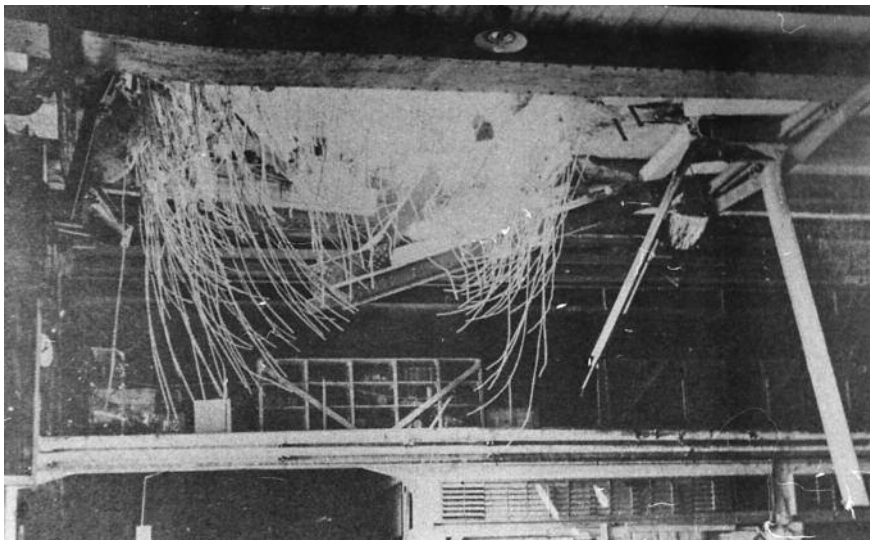




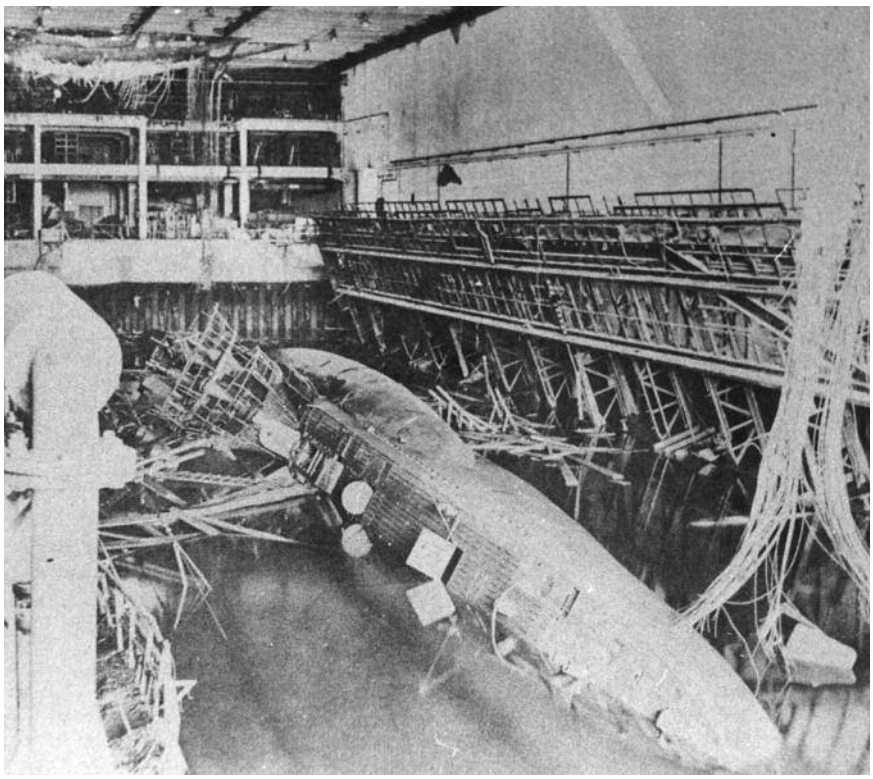
Of the 12 strikes, there was nothing outstanding in the way of destruction to indicate if any belonged to either of the two Grand Slams. A circle of 250 feet radius about the centre of the roof contained six strikes (representing 50 per cent of the hits and 30 per cent of the total number of bombs dropped), while a circle of 500 feet radius contained ten strikes (all hits, or 60 per cent of the total dropped). The roof hits resulted in partial penetration, detonation and subsequent perforation of the slabs. All the holes were hourglass-shaped, ranging from 14 to 25 feet in diameter.

Owing to premature detonation, and hence incomplete penetration, only slight damage due to blast and no fragmentation damage was apparent on the inside of the pens so that the destruction from these hits was not serious. However, they resulted in a certain amount of minor damage to operating devices caused by falling debris within the pens, as well as blast damage to light structures and the anti-aircraft gun positions on the roof and adjacent to the pens. In addition, a floating dry dock in Pen 5 supporting *U-677* and *U-982* undergoing repair partially sank because of damage to the pontoons, the two submarines remaining capsized but unharmed. One near-miss 100 feet from the west side wall disturbed its pile foundation and caused settlement and lateral displacement of the wall and roof. These displacements extended over about 240 feet of wall with a maximum settlement of 18 inches and a lateral motion of 12 inches opposite the bomb crater. Contrary to other Tallboy precision attacks, this particular one caused heavy casualties because more than 3,000 civilians had taken shelter in the pens, 15 being killed, 39 badly wounded and another 38 suffering minor wounds.

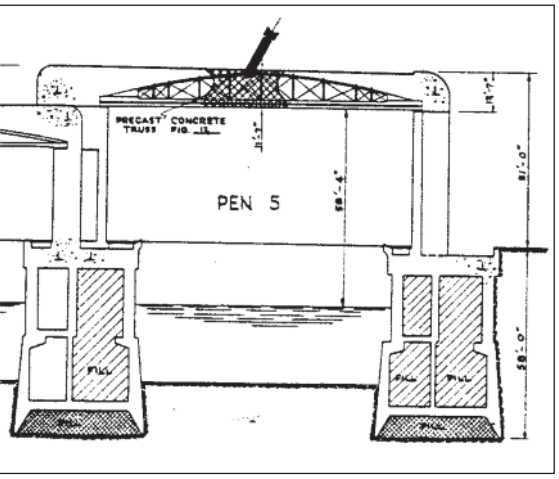
It was believed that no structural repairs would be possible or required since the stability of the damaged wall was not affected. The damage caused by the direct hits was to be repaired by removing the pieces of steel or concrete trusses — originally embedded in the concrete of the roof — that hung from the bomb holes, and filling the latter with reinforced concrete plugs. A realignment of crane rails, switchboards, etc. was also necessary but the end of the war came before any work had started. Damage to the dry docks and equipment inside the pens delayed production seriously, whereas that caused to the structure itself resulted merely in an inconvenience to clear away the debris. The attack on Fink II of April 9 showed that these massive structures, which had been designed for that very purpose, had a protective value even against the largest bombs. The attack also proved that in order to achieve maximum strategic damage, it was necessary for the bomb to detonate within the confines of the pen where the blast would be decidedly more destructive.



The penetration of the bomb in the roof of pen No. 1.



Pen No. 5. The crater in the roof caused by hit No. 6 can be seen at the far end; the U-Boat is either the *U-677* or *U-982*.



However, by this time, the U-Boats in the Hamburg pens had already been abandoned by the majority of their crews. When the British drew closer towards the Elbe, most of the U-Boat crews which had not reached operational readiness or were not combat-ready for technical reasons, were hastily transformed into infantry to reinforce the army in their desperate final struggle. Thousands of sailors, most of them young men without any experience in land warfare, were concentrated in the 2. Marine-Infanterie-Division, while others had to serve in anti-tank units or mixed battle groups. Many of them lost their lives in the battles that raged in the triangle formed by the Weser, Aller and Elbe rivers; on the banks of the Aller; on the Lüneburg Heath; and opposing the Allied bridgehead across the Elbe at Lauenburg.

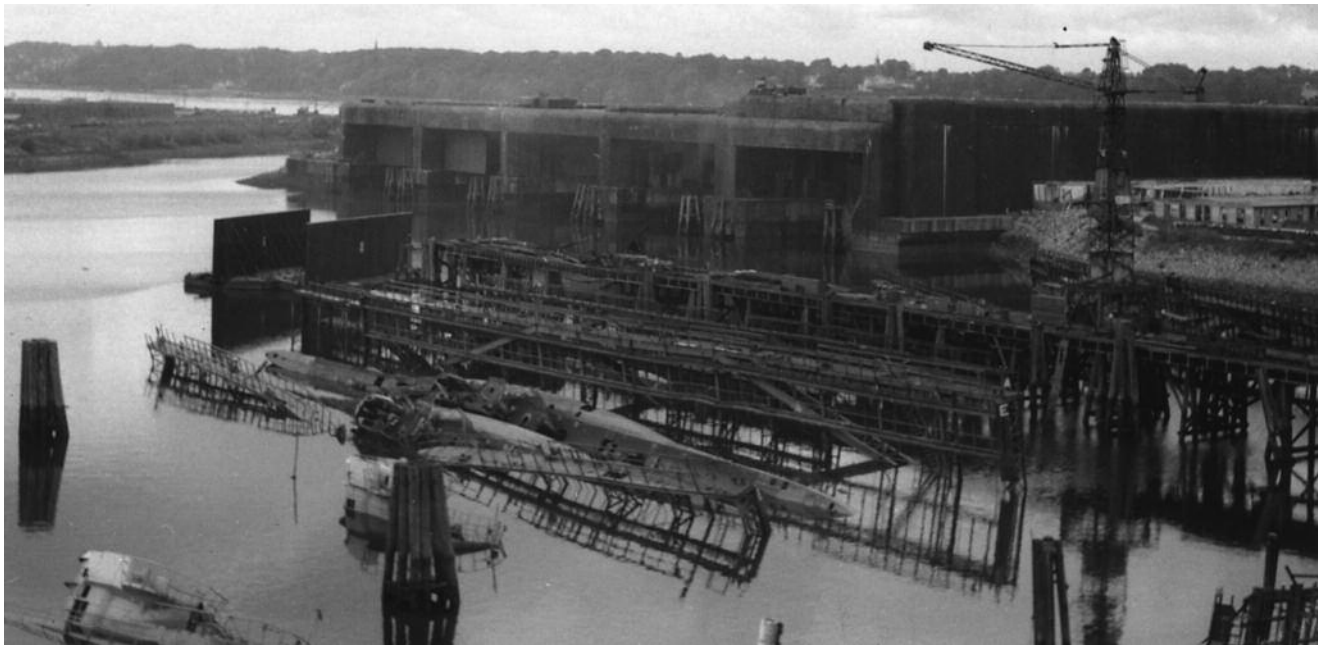
Worthy of note in the battles against the British forces which had been stalled on the left bank of the Elbe, are the close-combat tank destruction unit of Korvettenkapitän Peter Erich ('Ali') Cremer, drawn from U-Boat volunteers, which knocked out many tanks and other armoured fighting vehicles within only a few days. Also the combat group of Knight's Cross holder Korvettenkapitän Carl Emmermann, and the reinforced combat unit formed by crew members of *U-3004* under the command of Kapitänleutnant Otto Peschel. Although not trained to carry out infantry tasks, the latter on April 25 carried out a well-executed, almost classic infantry attack, using the tactics of surprise and fire and movement with exceptional skill. Reinforced by Reichsarbeitsdienst (Reich Labour Service) and Luftwaffe personnel, they crossed the Elbe in dinghies and small fishing boats and successfully attacked the 1st Battalion of the Herefordshire Regiment (part of the 11th Armoured Division) which had dug in in the village of Hoopte. The British suffered casualties and lost four Cromwell tanks. At dawn, the attackers withdrew the same way they had come, having lost only one man.

With the end of the war now in sight Dönitz was determined to surrender the Kriegsmarine on his own responsibility when, on the evening of April 30, to his great surprise he received a message from Berlin appointing him Hitler's successor. That same day, instructions were issued for the scuttling of the fleet. The code-word 'Regenbogen' (Rainbow) went out, upon receipt of which all warships were to be sunk or destroyed. On May 3, a German delegate proceeded to the headquarters of British 21st Army Group to negotiate a separate capitulation (see *After the Battle* No. 48). Field-Marshal Bernard Montgomery agreed to accept the surrender of the North German area on condition that Holland, Denmark and the German fleet were included and that no weapons or ships would be destroyed before the surrender, which was to come into force at 8 a.m. on May 5. In effect, this meant handing over every available unit of the Kriegsmarine, a heavy blow to Dönitz, since any such action violated tradition and every concept of military honour. With heavy heart, Dönitz accepted in order not to prejudice the chances of escape of German forces and refugees in the East to the West. On May 4, all U-Boats at sea were ordered to cease hostilities and return immediately to base. However, the commanders who had already prepared their U-Boats for scuttling in accordance with the 'Regenbogen' orders were of the opinion that the orders forbidding the sinking of their ships were contrary to Dönitz's real intention, and therefore many scuttled their boats. At 0.01 a.m. on May 9, the general surrender came into force, the Allied demand for the German fleet to be handed over intact having been passed to the U-Boats on the previous day. Complying with these orders U-Boats at sea duly surfaced and proceeded to their allotted surrender ports flying the black flag.

Owing to the various delays, by the end of the war only two Type XXI U-Boats had carried out an operational patrol. The first to be ready was *U-2511*, commanded by Korvettenkapitän Adalbert Schnee. She sailed for Norway on March 18 but on arrival had to remedy certain mechanical defects and repair some slight damage sustained during her deep diving trials so that it was April 30 before she was ready to depart on her first operational cruise. Her commanding officer had been assigned the Caribbean area, and his personal patrol instructions included the requirement that he also test the boat thoroughly by making the toughest demands on her. A few hours after receiving the surrender-and-return-to-base message on May 4, *U-2511*, then to the north of the Faroes, sighted a British cruiser with her destroyer escort. Closing at high speed and then reducing to silent-running speed, Korvettenkapitän Schnee attained an attaking position inside the screen from which he carried out a dummy attack, albeit with six torpedo tubes in the ready. After a final observation of the target which was too close to miss, *U-2511* went deep. She then surrendered at Bergen in accordance with the Allied instructions. This was the only attack of any sort carried out by a Type XXI under battle conditions.

The other Type XXI to go on war patrol before the surrender was *U-3008* commanded by Korvettenkapitän Helmut Manseck. The patrol achieved no result and she was forced to surrender by British aircraft on May 11 before being escorted by

Apart from the two Type VIIc boats, there were four Type XXI U-Boats in Elbe II: *U-2501* captained by Oberleutnant zur See Hübschen; *U-2505* (Obereleutnant zur See der Reserve Joachim Düppe); *U-3004* (Kapitänleutnant Otto Peschel) and *U-3506* (Kapitänleutnant Gerd Thäter). In the absence of her commanding officer, the *U-2501* was scuttled *(above)* by her engineering officer, Leutnant Hans Noack. In the last days of the war, crews of all the submarines formed the 2. Marine-Infanterie-Division to oppose the advancing British forces and although not trained as infantry, Peschel's crew were instrumental in inflicting serious casualties on the 1st Battalion, the Herefordshire Regiment at Hoopte on April 25 for the loss of only one man. (IWM)



When the British 7th Armoured Division entered Hamburg they found their goal a devastated and dead city. Whole areas had been destroyed by air attacks and mile upon mile of blackened walls and burnt-out streets met their eyes. The dock area was even more devastated than the city, the shipyards presenting a wilderness of tangled girders and sunken wrecks. And in the middle of this chaos, unfinished Type XXI U-Boats still stood rusting on the slipways, while others, which had been preparing for sea, rested on the bottom of their berths or lay capsized in the water. (IWM)

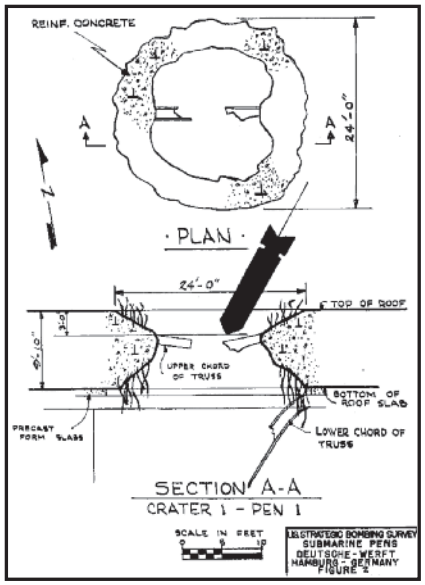
corvettes to Kiel. Later she was handed over to the United States and was operated by the US Navy until 1948.

At the time of the cease-fire, a number of Type XXIs which had reached Norway were carrying out trials and should have been ready to commence operations by mid-May at the latest. Some 30 to 50 others had finished their training in German home waters and were mostly completing minor adjustments prior to setting sail though by then many of their crews had already been sent to the front to fight as land soldiers. Many other Type XXIs were awaiting completion at the shipyards while some had fallen victim to Allied bombs.

By late April, the following six U-Boats — four Type XXIs and two Type VIIcs — had taken shelter in the Elbe II pens:

U-2501. She, as already described, was the first Type XXI to be commissioned and had been assigned as a trial and training boat to the 31. U-Flottille. Her batteries and propellers removed, she was by now unmanoeuvrable and was being used for instructional purposes by the crews assigned to the 8. Kriegsschiffbau-Lehr-Abteilung, a warship construction training unit. In the absence of her commanding officer, Oberleutnant zur See Hübschen, she was now under command of the engineer officer, Leutnant (Ing.) Hans Noack.

U-2505. A Type XXI under Oberleutnant zur See der Reserve Joachim Düppe, she was undergoing repairs caused by heavy bomb damage.



The United States had investigators ready to examine the effects of bomb-damage to dozens of German industrial and military targets and the seven-man US Strategic Bombing Survey team arrived at the Deutsche Werft shipyard on July 9. Although much of the debris from the April 9 raid had been cleared away, no repairs had been attempted so it was possible to carry out a thorough survey. This is one of the plans from their report (No. 151 in the series).

The decision had already been taken by the Allies at Teheran in 1943 to destroy Germany's military machine and her submarine fleet was destined for destruction in Operation 'Deadlight' (see *After the Battle* No. 36), and in October 1945 preparations were made to blow up the Hamburg U-Boat pens. Here, a member of 224 Field Company, Royal Engineers, inspects one of the craters on the roof of Fink II. (IWM)

The plan was to cut holes in the walls and floor and pack them with explosives, mainly 250kg aircraft bombs. Here, engineers working from rafts tethered inside one of the pens, are cutting the steel girders with blowpipes. (IWM)

U-3004. Commissioned on August 30, 1944 under command of Kapitänleutnant Otto Peschel, this Type XXI was another trial boat and belonged to the 4. U-Flottille which unit had been evacuated from Stettin when the Soviet Army approached. Owing to a diving accident, the boat had battery trouble and was waiting for new cells.

U-3506. A Type XXI, commanded by Kapitänleutnant Gerd Thäter, she was suffering from a breakdown of her electric motors.

U-684 and *U-685* were two Type VIIc boats which had not yet been completed.

For reasons unknown, all six boats were gathered in Elbe II's westernmost pen while the eastern pen remained empty. As only three boats fitted into the pen, the sterns of *U-684* and *U-2501* projected outside while *U-685* had to remain in front of the pen.

At Fink II there were by late April 1945 a total of seven U-Boats inside the pens: *U-677* and *U-982*, both Type VIIc boats which had sunk in their dry dock during the daylight air raid of April 9; the *U-747*, a training boat which had sustained heavy bomb damage on April 1 lying right in front of the entrance to Pen 5; and *U-2327*, *U-2332*, *U-2370* and *U-2371*, four Type XXIIIs which were approaching operational readiness.

On May 2, the Hamburg garrison commander agreed to surrender the city to the British forces the next day whereupon the crew members who had remained with their boats in the submarine pens decided to scuttle their vessels to prevent them from falling into enemy hands intact.

At Elbe II, Diesel-Obermaschinist Fritz Jenss and five crewmates aboard *U-3506* rigged explosive charges to the flood valves while the demolition squad of *U-3004* used dynamite. *U-2505* was scuttled using a depth charge and *U-2501* was sent to the bottom by her engineer officer, the four explosive charges breaking the boat's back.

At Fink II, Leutnant zur See Kurt Gumm, the second watch officer of *U-2371*, organised a demolition squad who acted at their own risk against orders. They obtained a large number of explosive charges and scuttled the boats although they met with stiff opposition from a high-ranking yard official and other crew members.

Following the intention of demilitarising Germany, the Allies ordered that the two Hamburg U-Boat pens be destroyed beyond repair. At Fink II, the scuttled boats were removed from the pens before the Royal Engineers set off 300 Luftwaffe bombs and 89 explosive charges on October 21, 1945. The demolition, set off by Major H. E. Donelly after a sergeant had fused the 30 tons of explosive, was watched by official spectators from a stand overlooking the Elbe. The demolition collapsed the inner walls, cracked the outer walls and brought the roof down to the water.

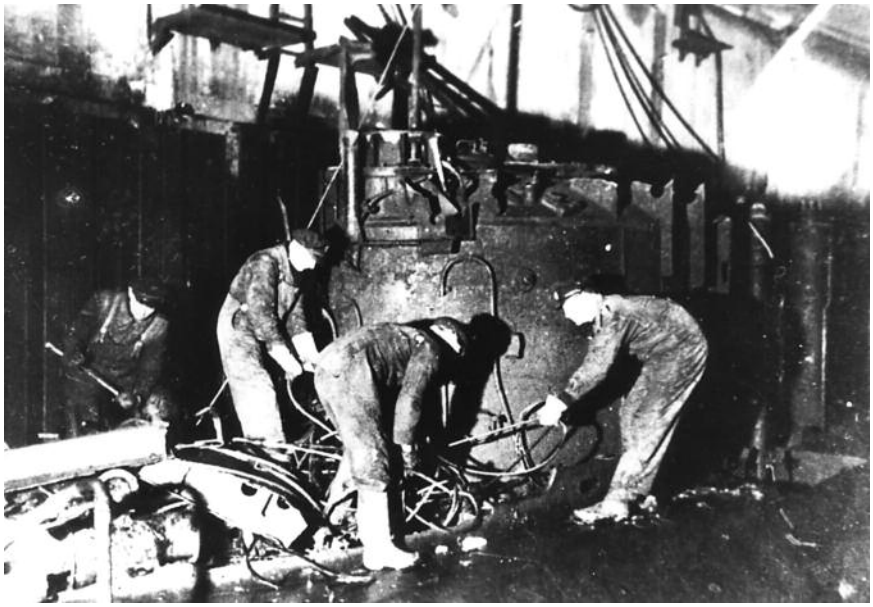
Boxes of German explosives are placed in the underground workshops. (IWM)

Sapper Stidson connects the bombs with Cordtex instantaneous detonation fuse. (IWM)

With all charges in position, the cables are run out past the two-foot-thick armoured steel doors. (IWM)

Sergeant R. Wardell, in charge of the working party, connects up the exploder with the help of Corporal R. Rigg. (IWM)

With everything all set, on October 21 Major H. E. Donelly had the pleasure of pressing the tit. (IWM)



While the U-Boats were removed from Fink II before demolition, at Elbe II only the three submarines scuttled outside the entrance were raised. Those inside were left in situ. *Above:* **Anything of value was surveyed and removed in 1949. (UBA)**

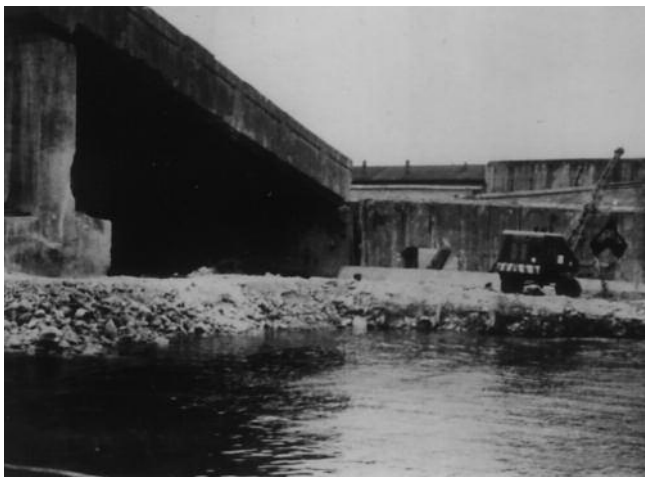
In 1949, the Hamburg city authorities started to remove the debris, but work was soon stopped because the German government, as the owner of the site, was not willing to pay for the clearance costs. In 1956, the demolition firms of Christiani & Nielsen, Siemens Bau-Union and Dyckerhoff & Widmann (the latter being the same one which had erected the Elbe II pens back in 1940-41) were ordered to clear the site. The costs were estimated at 9.9 million marks for a partial job or 14 million marks for the complete clearance of the site and it was assumed that work would take more than three years. In fact, nothing much happened and the ruins of the pens remained on view for many years, the area being only lightly fenced in.

The Deutsche Werft shipyard, on whose terrain Fink II stood and which itself lay mostly in ruins, saw a short period of Allied occupation before being used for repairs on fishing boats. Having recovered from the effects of wartime damage, Allied dismantling and building restrictions, Deutsche Werft began shipbuilding again in 1949 and quickly became the world's number one shipyard. However, by the 1970s the concern had became victim of the crisis facing the German shipbuilding industry and it closed in 1973. Most of the site was cleared over the following years and only very few of its original buildings can still be seen today, the new ones being occupied by yacht builders and dealers of marine equipment and supplies.

In the course of demolishing the shipyard facilities, the ruins of the Fink II pens were also razed to ground level, most of the concrete being removed and the remaining debris being buried under dredging material taken from the Elbe. At the same time the wartime extension of the Rüsch Canal was filled in. The whole area was then planted over, the former bunker site being marked by a low hill. Today, the site is a public recreation area.

Work began to demolish Elbe II in 1963 and continued over the next two years.

At the Elbe II pens, the three U-Boats which lay scuttled at the entrance to the westernmost pen were pulled out, raised and scrapped before the bunker was destroyed although the three submarines inside the pens were left in situ. The bunker was blown up on November 11, 1945, the Royal Engineers using 47 lorry-loads of Luftwaffe bombs in the process. The explosion left the inner wall, parts of the outer walls and the roof collapsed. *U-3506*, which lay next to the inner wall, was crushed by the ceiling but the other two boats survived unharmed. In 1949, a diver from Hamburg's bomb disposal squad surveyed the boats and established that there were no torpedoes or ammunition left on board any of them. By order of the British military authorities, he then removed some of the batteries for examination. In 1950-52, in order to salvage further valuable material, the conning towers of *U-3004* and *U-2505* were dismantled and the boats cannibalised. All remaining batteries, the Junkers air compressors, all copper cables and the diesel engine of *U-3004* were removed. Parts of the conning tower of *U-3506* were also dismantled. The scrap workers were all former navy personnel and they could only work during periods of low tide.

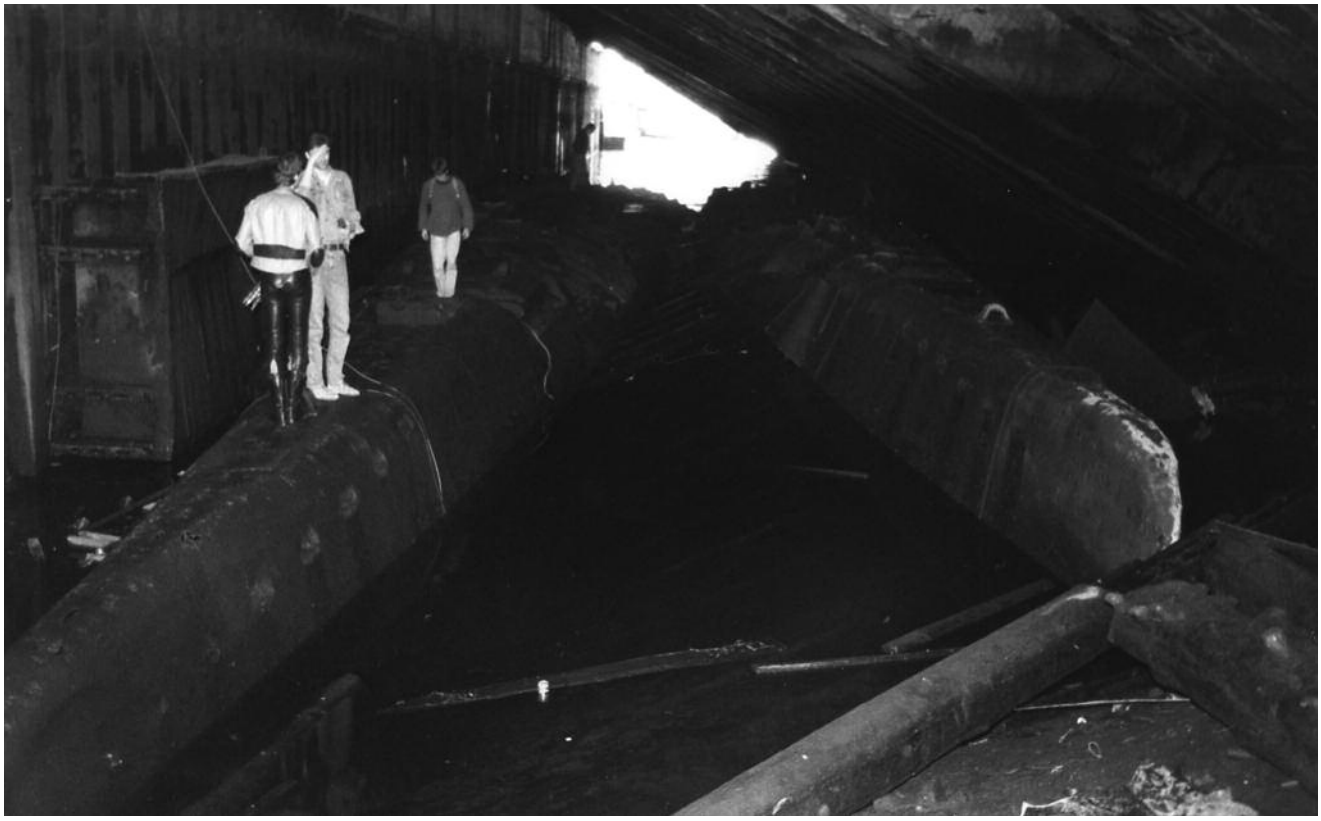


The ruins of Elbe II today — compare with the shot on page 32. The bridge is a post-war addition.

In 1963, the Hamburg authorities decided to remove parts of the former Elbe II to prevent the rubble from obstructing the facilities of the Howaldtswerke shipyard. The demolition firm of Oxygen Spreng- und Baugesellschaft, which had many years experience in removing all kinds of wartime bunkers and shelters, was contracted to break up the debris using explosives and heavy clearing equipment. Work continued throughout 1965, and 168 tons of reinforced concrete were taken away. An air-raid shelter at the back of the pens was also removed but, when it was found that the costs had risen to more than 400,000 marks, the authorities decided it would be too expensive to continue the job and the work was halted. In 1987, the Howaldtswerke yard closed and many of the old buildings and installations were torn down to make way for modern warehouses. The site is now known as Rosshafen Terminal.

Left: **The western wall of Elbe II is more or less undamaged . . . unlike that on the eastern side** *(right).*

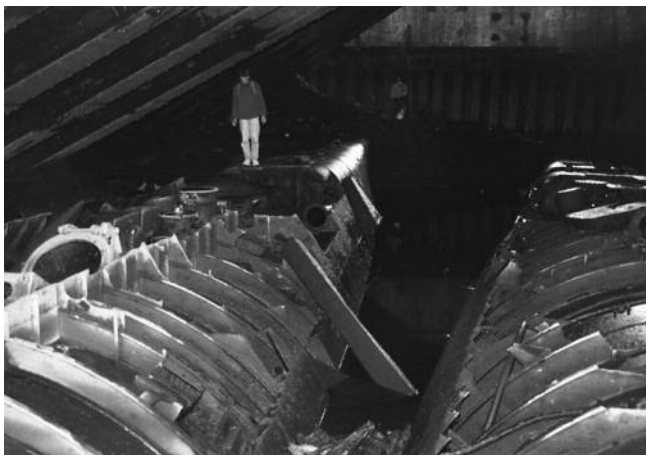
On top of the roof looking north-east down the Vulkanhafen towards the Elbe.



Above: **The cannibalised remains of the *U-3004* (left) and the *U-2505* (right). The conning towers were removed in the early 1950s in the scrap drive to recover valuable metals like the copper cabling.**

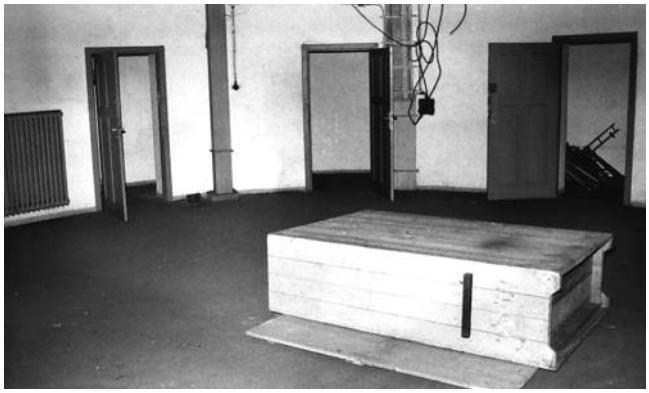
For many years, the remnants of Elbe II and the three U-Boats inside remained in a state of hibernation. However, in recent years they were discovered by bunker enthusiasts, amateur historians, souvenir hunters, and the like and, although access to the pens was strictly forbidden, sometimes up to a dozen people at a time could be found exploring the Type XXI tomb at low tide. In the dim light, and accompanied by the gurgling of the subsiding water, the boats would gradually emerge from their watery graves — a magic sight which always seemed to be over too quickly.

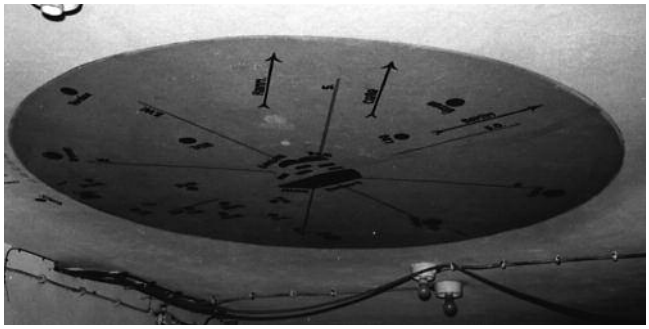
For decades the existence of the U-Boats was not widely known but in the late-1980s, enthusiasts broke through the security fencing to explore the interior of the pens. It was a souvenir-hunters paradise . . . that is until the authorities got wise to what was happening and spoiled the fun.



October 1995. The suction dredger *Ostsee* begins to pump sand into the interior to cover the wrecks.

Meanwhile the authorities were fearful that an accident might occur for which the city of Hamburg, as the owner of the site, would be compelled to pay damages. However, as the cost of total demolition was now estimated as high as 300 million marks, after three years deliberation, it was decided that a simpler option would be to seal the westernmost pen with sand. So, on the morning of October 6, 1995, the suction dredger *Ostsee* made fast to the pier at the entrance to the pen and began pumping sand inside, thus covering the submarines for good. It took only three days to seal the pen and completely bury the boats so that visitors entering the pen today will only see a thick layer of sand under which rest the last of Germany's famed Type XXI U-Boats.





Left: **At the same time, the doors of the nearby command post for the harbour flak guns (see aerial page 34) were welded shut but fortunately our author Jan Heitmann had had the foresight to photograph the interior beforehand. The bunker was of the Zombek type, sometimes incorrectly referred to as the Winkelturm. This one has four separate staircases connected by emergency bulkheads.** *Right:* **The command centre lay on the ground floor where this map was painted on the ceiling.**

Above: **Fink II on the other hand has now been totally covered with soil with just odd relics showing through** *(below).*

Today, the *Wilhelm Bauer*, ex-*U-2540* — scuttled in 1945, raised in 1957, decommissioned in 1980 and now moored on public display at Bremerhaven — is the only surviving specimen of a boat type, which was a milestone in the history of submarine construction.

A sister boat of the submarines buried in Hamburg harbour, the *Wilhelm Bauer*, ex *U-2540*, is the only Type XXI U-boat that has survived. Commissioned on February 24, 1945, she was sent to the bottom by her own crew on May 4 after she had suffered severe damage from British bombs off Flensburg lightship. In 1957 she was raised, restored by the Howaldtswerke shipyard in Kiel and recommissioned on September 1, 1959 as *Wilhelm Bauer*, the largest U-boat of the Federal German Navy. In 1968 she was temporarily laid up until she was recommissioned for a third time on May 20, 1970. From then on she was used by the Bundesamt für Wehrtechnik und Beschaffung (Federal Ordnance Department) as a trial boat under a civilian crew. After 35 years' service, including one sinking and several collisions with surface ships, she was finally retired on November 18, 1980. Since 1984 she has been on public display in the museum harbour in Bremerhaven.

THE TRAGEDY OF THE *MARIE GEORGETTE*

By Alex Randon

On December 29, 1941, early in the afternoon, the motor schooner No. 5 *Marie Georgette* left Malta's Grand Harbour at Valletta on her routine trip to the sister island of Gozo carrying supplies which included a considerable amount of kerosene. The skipper, Marcel Theuma, was in charge — a mariner with a long and courageous career at sea. In the First World War he had served in the Merchant Navy and was twice torpedoed. He had a crew of ten and carried 12 passengers.

When she started on her voyage the *Marie Georgette* sailed under a clear sky but a choppy sea, yet there was nothing to indicate that this trip would differ materially from hundreds of similar trips to Gozo. However at about 4 p.m., as she was passing off the Pembroke Ranges, two Messerschmitt Bf 109s appeared and dived to attack. The little vessel carried nothing in the way of defensive or offensive armament and the first burst mortally wounded Captain Theuma and set the schooner on fire. Before he lost consciousness however, and with great presence of mind, the captain turned over his helm and headed the ship in the direction of the forbidding rocks of St Georges on which the sea was breaking heavily. As the *Marie Georgette* approached the shore, some crew members jumped overboard when they realised that the burning schooner would smash into the rocks.

The noise of the diving aircraft and the rattle of the machine guns had alerted a party of Maltese and English soldiers who were on duty at St Georges, and they arrived on the scene simultaneously with Constantino Sammut who had come to give what assistance he could from his home in St Andrews Road, St Andrews. As they made ready to effect rescue, Charles Jones, the superintendant of the Air Raid Precautions unit in Sliema, drove up with the medical officer, Dr Alfred Azzopardi, and an ambulance with a complement of first-aiders. Without hesitation Mr Sammut jumped into the sea and assisted two badly-wounded men out of the water. In the meantime, the military personnel with Mr Jones and his ARP men organised a human chain to assist the other sailors who had jumped overboard from the burning ship to make a safe landing. As the rescuers seized each man, they had to battle against the waves to prevent him from being sucked back into the sea. Even when ashore they were still in danger of being swept back until they had crossed the barbed wire defences on the foreshore, which was effected by throwing greatcoats and blankets over the entanglements.

'Marcel Theuma, Died December 29, 1941, aged 51 years. Rest in Peace'.

The drums of kerosene on board continued to explode and burning spirit poured onto the water. Regardless of the danger, however, some of the rescuers swam to the ship and climbed on board to rescue the dying skipper whom they found still at the helm. He was lowered over the side and his rescuers then swam with him to the shore. Altogether 20 persons were brought safely ashore, among them Joseph Muscat and Emanuel Debono, both passengers, seriously-wounded, and all of them soaked through to the skin. The most serious cases were admitted for treatment to the St Patrick's Military Hospital nearby, whilst soldiers lent others their clothing while the sodden garments dried. Then the remainder, wrapped up in blankets, were taken by the ARP either to the civil hospital or to a nearby hostel. Charles Jones personally arranged the admission of the survivors, and provided blankets and food for the night, while A. B. Cohen, assistant to the Lieutenant-Governor, fixed up transport to Gozo. The casualties were one dead, two missing and nine wounded.

Captain Theuma was killed at the wheel of his schooner *Marie Georgette* *(above)* while en route from Valletta to Gozo. He brought his boat ashore on the rocky beach below St Georges (arrowed in the top picture), used today as a firing range.

Still lying on the foreshore of St Georges after being exposed to the elements for nearly 60 years — the rusted remains of a brave little vessel. *Above:* **The flywheel and** *right* **the crankshaft of the *Marie Georgette*.**

The rescue work was carried out with efficiency and expedition and the ARP officer later received the following letter of gratitude from the engineer of the *Marie Georgette:*

'On behalf of the survivors from the crew and passengers of the unfortunate schooner *Marie Georgette*, I wish to express my very heartfelt thanks and obligation for the prompt and excellent help given to us by the ARP detachment in Sliema. Enough to say that some of us owe their very lives to the Superintendent and his staff for the arduous rescue and first-aid work rendered to us under the circumstances. No stone was left unturned to see to our comforts by Supt. Jones, and not until arrangements were made for the return journey to Gozo did he lose touch with us. Again from our hearts I thank you, and believe me, that we shall never forget our debts to your Superintendent and staff at the ARP centre in Sliema.'

The excellent services of the military were also recognised in Fortress HQ when the Governor, Sir Edward Jackson, directed that a special mention be made in the records of the men concerned which included members of the Royal Engineers, 2nd Devonshire Regiment, and the Static Group of the King's Own Malta Regiment. The Governor paid a special visit to the headquarters of the ARP in Sliema where he expressed his appreciation to Charles Jones and his men; whilst at a parade, Mr Jones presented Costantino Sammut with a letter of thanks from the Lieutenant-Governor acknowledging his praiseworthy, courageous and public-spirited action.

Below: **A letter of commendation was sent by the Lieutenant-Governor of Malta, Sir Edward Jackson, to Constantino Sammut, a local civilian who risked his life to rescue two of the crew.**

LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR MALTA

6th January, 1942.

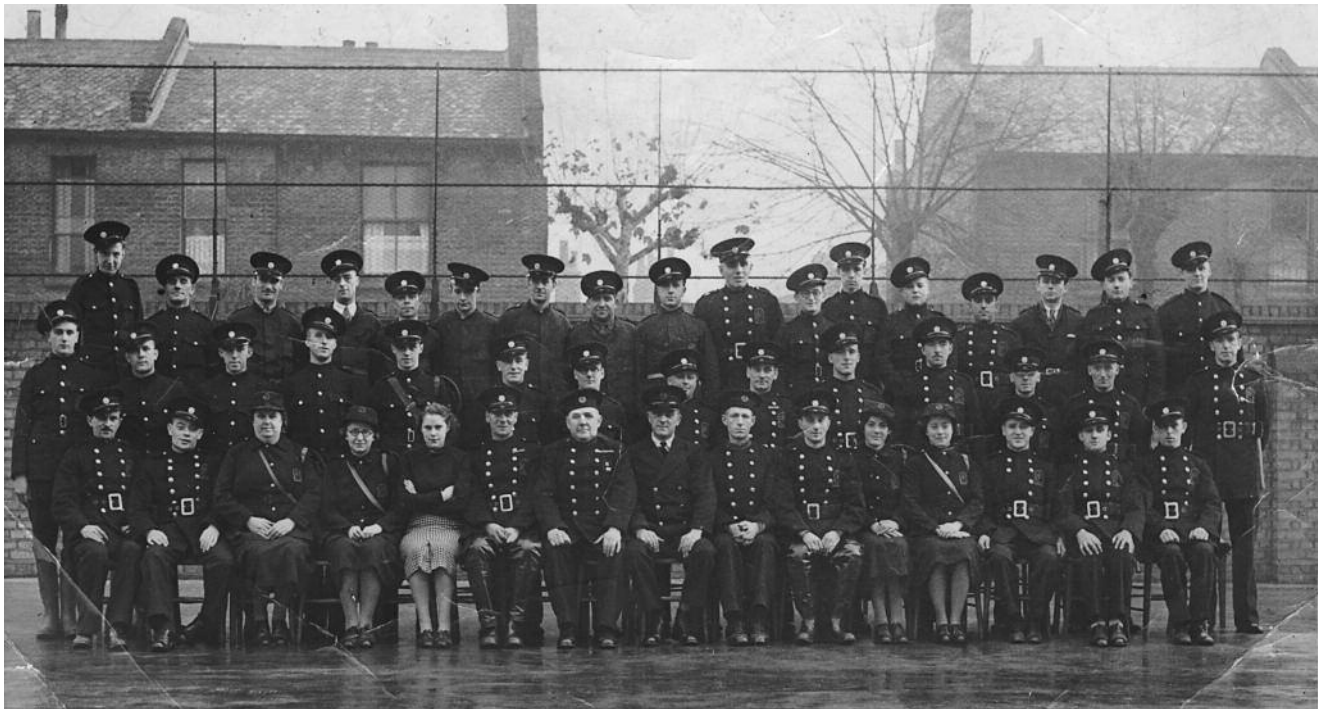
Dear Mr.Sammut,

I have learnt with much gratification of your excellent work on the 29th December, when the schooner "Marie Georgette" was attacked and set on fire during an air-raid. In conveying to you an expression of the thanks and appreciation of the Government, I would like to add my own admiration of your courageous and prompt action in swimming out to the rescue of two badly wounded men in very difficult conditions.

Yours sincerely,

Edw. Jackson

Mr Theuma's name appears on the war memorial in his home village of Ghajnsielem in Gozo, unfortunately with a mis-spelt Christian name and incorrect age. His grave lies in Malta in Santa Maria Addolorata Cemetery at Paola (Grave 14 in Compartment A, Section U, Division East).

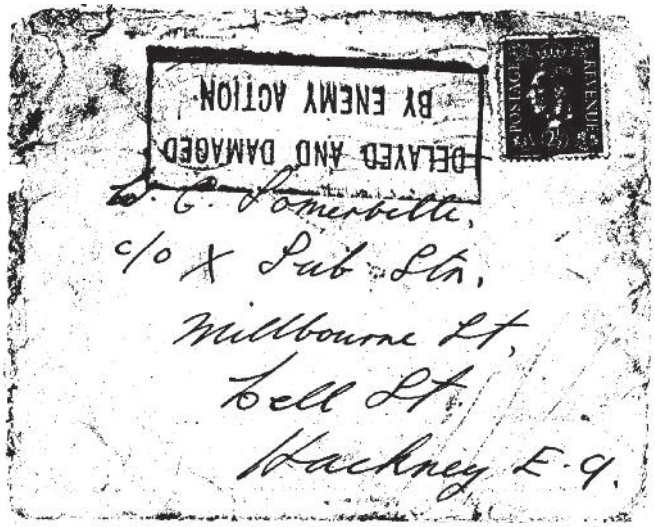


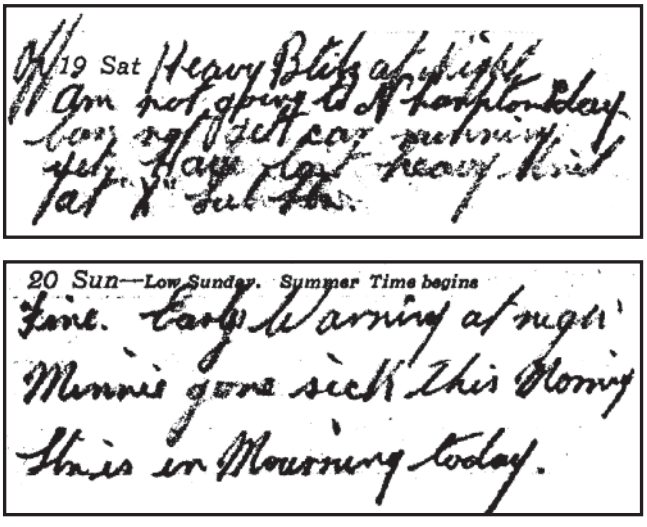
FIREMEN REMEMBERED

By Stephanie Maltman

Some years ago, after the death of William Somerville in January 1977, his son Frank was looking through his father's diary for the year 1941. Bill had been a member of the London Auxiliary Fire Service (AFS) during the war having joined the AFS as a volunteer in 1938. Stationed in Homerton, East London, he served until the end of hostilities but, like many wartime veterans, he never spoke of his experiences in the Fire Service. So it was with some interest that Frank read an entry for Sunday, April 20, 1941: 'Stn in mourning today'. That day William Somerville had been on leave but other members of his crew stationed at Millborne Street School, a sub-station under Homerton, were not so lucky. It was Hitler's birthday and the Luftwaffe, as Göring wrote, was 'in earnest mood and high spirits' as they celebrated it with a 1,000-ton raid on the Capital. Bombing was heavy that night, near and along the river, east of Tower Bridge; later it would be remembered by Londoners as 'The Saturday'.

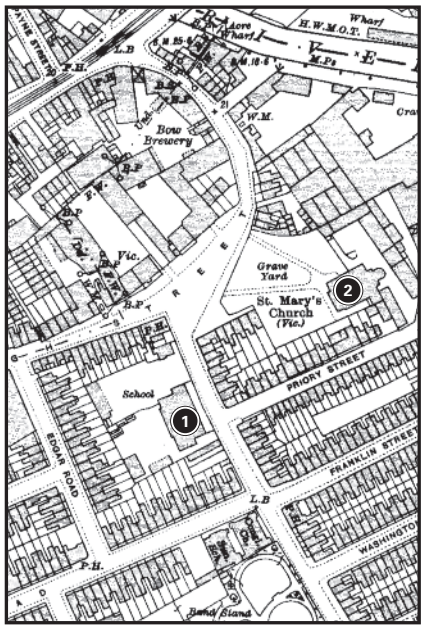
By midnight things were growing steadily worse in the East End of London. Poplar and its surrounding district were under severe pressure and most local crews were out fighting fires. Frank's father's crew was ordered to a sub-station in Poplar — 24U at the Old Palace School in St Leonard's Street. They had not been there long when they were joined, just after 1.50 a.m., by four crews from Beckenham in Kent. Scarcely had the reinforcements driven into the playground when a land-mine fell, smashing through the roof of one of the towers of the school and exploding at the bottom of the stairwell It was precisely 1.53 a.m.




19 Sat
20 Sun—Low Sunday. Summer Time begins
Fine. Early Warning at night
Mummie gone sick this Morning
This in Mourning today.

With the outbreak of war in September 1939, and the wholesale evacuation of schoolchildren from London, empty schools were taken over by the London Auxiliary Fire Service to serve as emergency stations. Schools were ideal as the playgrounds provided ample parking for the appliances while canteen facilities were on hand in the kitchens. Frank Somerville's father was stationed at Milborne Street School (Sub-Station 24X) *(top)* **at Hackney (it no longer exists), which was one of the five satellite stations under the old permanent London Fire Brigade station in Brunswick Road, Poplar. It was while Frank was looking through his father's diary that he came across this enigmatic entry** *(right)*. **It set him off on a five-year quest to find out what had happened . . . and to eventually become a founder member of 'Firemen Remembered' — the body set up by like-minded volunteers to record and remember the fallen heroes of London's wartime Fire Services.**

Auxiliary Fire Service Log, April 19, 1941: 'A busy night but the fire situation was not on the same scale as on 16th April. A total of 612 fires of which 1 was major, 7 serious, 85 medium and 519 small. The districts most affected were West Ham, East Ham and Barking, to whose assistance 7 officers, 219 pumps, 5 fire-boats, 6 turntable ladders and 2 canteen vans were sent. Small contingents were also sent to Carshalton, Croydon and Erith and 12 pumps stood by in London from Barnes, Beckenham and Mitcham. The fire situation in London was never really serious and sufficient appliances were always available to meet the demand. No difficulties were experienced in obtaining water supplies. A great number of high explosive bombs were dropped, particularly in the 'C' and 'D' districts. Four L.F.B. stations received direct hits, namely, 24U Old Palace School, St Leonard's Street, E3, 30Y Stewart Headlam School, Somerford Street, E2, 42 Sub-district Station, Woolwich, and 42W Mulgrave Place L.C.C. School, Rectory Place, S.E.18. At 30Y and 42 the damage was not serious and there were no major casualties. At 24U four pumps from the Beckenham Fire Service were standing by as a regional move and 21 Beckenham firemen are missing in addition to the London station officer, 12 men and 2 women. Of the total of 36, 11 bodies were recovered by 20th April.' (LFCDA)



Old Palace School [1] in St Leonard's Street, Poplar, was rebuilt in 1952. St Mary's Church [2] behind the houses in Priory Road was also pulled down although its derelict graveyard still survives beside the Northern Approach Road to the Blackwall Tunnel. Amazingly, the only identifiable feature remaining is the sewer stink pipe! (LFCDA)

Left: **Here 32 firemen and two firewomen died, 21 being crews from Beckenham sent to London in anticipation of a major raid. '24Z' denotes the auxiliary station at the school in Ricardo Street.** *Right:* **We are now looking across the corner of the playground behind Bruce Road with the spire — since demolished — of the Congregational Church in the background. (LFCDA)**

Two auxiliary firewomen, Winifred Peters who was 39, the mother of three young children, and Hilda Dupree, 21, who was standing in for a friend who had gone to a dance, were on duty in the watchroom at the foot of the stairs. Their bodies were never recovered. The 32 firemen outside, although buried by rubble from the collapsing building, are believed to have been killed by blast. Half the school was demolished and a major fire started throughout the remainder. It took two days to recover the bodies of the men and many of the Beckenham wives knew nothing of their husband's deaths until late on the Monday afternoon.

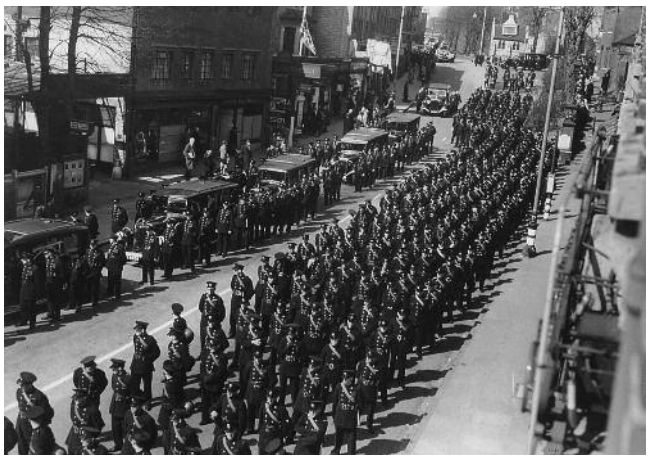
In all 21 Beckenham firemen died at the Old Palace School. The funeral of 19 of them, who were interred in a communal grave in Beckenham Crematorium (then Elmer's End Cemetery) took place a week later. According to newspaper reports at the time it was 'the largest ever seen in the borough of Beckenham'. The town was in mourning. Shops and businesses closed and local people lined the route to the cemetery. Officers and men from all over London, representing the Fire Brigade, accompanied the procession which took half an hour to pass any given point. The two other men killed, brothers-in-law Ernest (Reg) Beadle and Norman Mountjoy, had been buried together a day earlier, at their families' request, in the quiet country churchyard of St John's, West Wickham.

Below left and right: **The huge cortege, led by two flower-bedecked fire engines, proceeds along the High Street in Beckenham to the communal grave which had been prepared in Elmers End Cemetery on Elmers End Road. (LFCDA)**

OLD PALACE SCHOOL, POPLAR

APRIL 19/20, 1941

Fireman	Percy Aitchison	West Wickham Auxiliary Fire Service
Fireman	Ronald Bailey	West Wickham Auxiliary Fire Service
Fireman	Alan Barber	Elmers End Auxiliary Fire Service
Fireman	Ernest Beadle	West Wickham Auxiliary Fire Service
Fireman	Kenneth Bowles	West Wickham Auxiliary Fire Service
Fireman	John Barrell	London Auxiliary Fire Service
Fireman	Patrick Campbell	London Auxiliary Fire Service
Fireman	Henry Carden	West Wickham Auxiliary Fire Service
Fireman	Robert Deans	West Wickham Auxiliary Fire Service
Firewoman	Hilda Dupree	London Auxiliary Fire Service
Fireman	Frank Endean	Stanhope Grove Auxiliary Fire Service
Fireman	Cecil Farley	West Wickham Auxiliary Fire Service
Fireman	George Hall	Elmers End Auxiliary Fire Service
Fireman	Bertie Harris	London Auxiliary Fire Service
Fireman	Leslie Healey	West Wickham Auxiliary Fire Service
Junior Driver	Ernest Henley	London Auxiliary Fire Service
Fireman	Sidney Jones	London Auxiliary Fire Service
Fireman	Albert Kite	Stanhope Grove Auxiliary Fire Service
Fireman	John Mead	London Auxiliary Fire Service
Fireman	Vernon Middleditch	London Auxiliary Fire Service
Fireman	Alfred Minter	Stanhope Grove Auxiliary Fire Service
Fireman	Norman Mountjoy	West Wickham Auxiliary Fire Service
Fireman	Frederick Parcell	Elmers End Auxiliary Fire Service
Leading Fireman	Martin Parfett	West Wickham Auxiliary Fire Service
Firewoman	Winifred Peters	London Auxiliary Fire Service
Fireman	William Plant	Elmers End Auxiliary Fire Service
Fireman	Cyril Porter	London Auxiliary Fire Service
Fireman	William Rashbrook	London Auxiliary Fire Service
Fireman	Leonard Roots	Elmers End Auxiliary Fire Service
Fireman	Albert Saville	London Auxiliary Fire Service
Station Officer	Richard Sinstadt	London Auxiliary Fire Service
Leading Fireman	Edgar Vick	West Wickham Auxiliary Fire Service
Leading Fireman	Walter Woodland	Stanhope Grove Auxiliary Fire Service
Fireman	Herbert Wotton	Stanhope Grove Auxiliary Fire Service



Left: **The burial of 19 of the firemen from Beckenham took place on April 26. (LFCDA)** *Right:* **Remembrance Service at the same graveside on April 20, 2000. Frank Somerville stands fourth from the left in the wartime fireman's uniform.**

The tragedy at the Old Palace School was particularly devastating for the people of Beckenham as it was the third to hit the local Fire Brigade in the space of a month. In 1939, Beckenham, although in Kent, was on the outer circle of the London Civil Defence Region. It was part of 'K' district for which the Chief Officer of Beckenham was the Assistant Regional Fire Officer. 'K' district comprised Bexley, Orpington, Chiselhurst, Sidcup, Crayford, Penge and Erith, as well as Beckenham itself. The borough of Beckenham consisted of Beckenham and West Wickham. There were two fire stations in the borough, the Headquarters in Bromley Road and a district station at West Wickham.

On March 19, 1941, a crew of men from West Wickham was on its way to Silvertown as part of a convoy. The entrance to the Blackwall Tunnel was blocked and the crew was forced to make a detour across one of the bridges further up river to find its way back to the East End. To many of the men from South London, north of the river was a foreign country and navigation in the blackout made things even more difficult. In Plaistow Road they were held up by fallen debris and lines of hose. Overhead, enemy planes were uncomfortably close. Their increasing anxiety was justified when an HE (High Explosive) bomb landed between two appliances, injuring both crews, but those in the one behind more seriously. All five of the crew from West Wickham died within hours. Thomas Webb, who was in the appliance in front of the bomb, remembers that 'they didn't die quickly and they didn't die quietly'. The incident was recorded in a painting *3 a.m. in The Plaistow Road* by Leslie Baker, a fireman artist, perhaps better remembered for his cartoons. Those who died were also buried together in St John's Churchyard, West Wickham, next to where a few days later, Firemen Beadle and Mountjoy were to join them. There is an added note of poignancy in the photographs of the funeral procession as several of the men who were later to die at the Old Palace School may be seen on them as pall bearers.

On April 16/17, four Beckenham firemen died much nearer to home when an HE bomb exploded behind an appliance on its way to an incident on the corner of Court Downs Road and Wickham Way. This was the night when Carl Taylor, a local hairdresser and auxiliary fireman, won the George Medal for bravery, the first resident of the borough to achieve that distinction. Taylor was the driver of the heavy unit. When the bomb fell, burning fragments bounced forward and pierced the petrol tank causing an immediate explosion. Three men riding on the running board were killed instantly. Carl Taylor and the fourth man, Jack Maynard, were inside the vehicle.

PLAISTOW ROAD, WEST HAM

MARCH 19, 1941

Fireman	Wesley Drew	Coney Hall Auxiliary Fire Service
Fireman	Denis Fitzgerald	Coney Hall Auxiliary Fire Service
Fireman	Frederick Moore	Coney Hall Auxiliary Fire Service
Fireman	Leslie Palmer	Coney Hall Auxiliary Fire Service
Leading Fireman	Stanley Short	Coney Hall Auxiliary Fire Service

It is the intention of 'Firemen Remembered' to mark all those sites where multiple deaths of firemen occurred — like Plaistow Road in West Ham (see *The Blitz Then and Now,* Volume 2, page 488) and the incident on the corner of Court Downs Road and Wickham Road in Beckenham.

COURT DOWNS ROAD/WICKHAM ROAD, BECKENHAM

APRIL 16/17, 1941

Fireman	Richard Beacon	Beckenham Auxiliary Fire Service
Leading Fireman	David Chalmers	Beckenham Auxiliary Fire Service
Fireman	Stanley Hudders	Beckenham Auxiliary Fire Service
Fireman	John Maynard	Beckenham Auxiliary Fire Service

Cyril Demarne, former West Ham fire chief and author of *The London Blitz – A Fireman's Tale,* unveiled the plaque at Old Palace School 'in memory of the 13 London firemen and women and 21 Beckenham firemen killed on the night of 19th April 1941 when a bomb destroyed the old school being used a a sub-fire station. This is the largest single loss of Fire Brigade personnel in English history.'

Though injured and badly burnt, Taylor managed to crawl out of the driver's seat and on to the road, then went back to rescue his companion. John Maynard lived for almost seven months on the danger list before he succumbed to his injuries on November 9, 1941.

A note in the *Hayes Observer and Times* describes how at their monthly meeting, members of the Penge Urban District Council, a close neighbour to Beckenham, rose in approval when their leader stood to pay tribute to the people of the town and to express sympathy for them in their sad loss. Beckenham had lost 30 members of its Fire Brigade, the largest loss of any brigade in the country relative to its size.

When he read the brief entry in his father's diary Frank had neither any idea of the background to the incident, nor did he realise the scale of the tragedy and its impact on his father. He decided to persuade the local authority — the London Borough of Tower Hamlets — that the deaths should be remembered by the siting of a commemorative plaque at the present Old Palace School (which had been rebuilt in 1952) and in April 1997 Frank's vision became a reality. The plaque records the number who died, but also, equally important, the fact that this was 'the largest single loss of Fire Brigade personnel in English history'.

It has been suggested that for reasons of morale, in an area constantly under heavy bombardment, the incident was not widely reported at the time. This meant that extensive research was necessary before the details began to fall into place. During our investigations it became clear that there were many such incidents in the London Region, in which similar losses of life had occurred, involving multiple deaths of Fire Brigade personnel. We therefore decided to look in more detail at some of these.

The number killed at the Old Palace School was the largest in one place and at one time. Thereafter, in London, casualties range from the 17 at the Surrey Music Hall, Blackfriars Road, on May 11, 1941 down to incidents in which one or two firemen lost their lives. Most of these deaths — over 300 in total — took place during the period of the London Blitz and it is believed that nearer to 400 personnel were killed in the Capital between 1939 and 1945. Although the majority were members of the Auxiliary Fire Service, on closer inspection it was found that while, at the beginning of the war, the ratio of auxiliaries to regulars was approximately ten to one so, too, during the whole of the wartime period, was the number of their deaths.

In conversation with ex-wartime members of the Fire Service and relatives of many of those who died, a feeling emerged of sadness and disappointment that so little has been done to create more public awareness of men and women who lost their lives not somewhere in a 'foreign field' but on our own streets, in places many of us pass everyday. They were part of our own communities and they died defending them. They are part of our history and the history of our communities and, in a very real sense, their memory belongs to us.

In 1991, a national memorial to firemen and women who died during the Second World War was unveiled outside St Paul's Cathedral (see *The London Blitz A Fireman's Tale*). Nine years later, 'Firemen Remembered' was established out of a desire among a number of independent people, including fire brigade historians and veteran wartime firemen, to create permanent memorials in places where these deaths occurred; to create, in the words of the historian Jay Winter 'sites of memory' where there might be permanent recognition both of those who lost their lives and of the significance of part of the wartime history of these places.

The five firemen killed when their appliance was hit in Plaistow Road (in London's East End) on March 19, 1941 were taken back to Beckenham for burial in the parish churchyard of St John (off Layham Court Road in West Wickham). In the single grave to the left lie Ernest Beadle and Norman Mountjoy, killed at Old Palace School, who were brothers-in-law. This picture was taken on the occasion of a wreath-laying in April 1999 in the presence of the Fire Brigade Chaplain, Alan Healey, when a plaque once in the old West Wickham Fire Station was transferred to the new station.

The title 'Firemen Remembered' is a deliberate echo of the name 'Civilians Remembered', Marianne Frederick's campaign to create a civilian memorial park beside the Thames in Wapping (see *After the Battle* No. 96). Since firemen and women are classified as civilians in the Roll of Civilian War Dead compiled by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission after the war, the link between the two groups is obvious. In many of the incidents, there were also civilian casualties and, where this is appropriate, they will be mentioned.

The use of the word 'firemen' in the light of today's preferred title 'firefighters' is also a deliberate decision. In 1940 members of the fire services were referred to as 'firemen' and 'firewomen'; thus they are recorded as such in the lists of civilian war casualties and, in most cases where their role is acknowledged at all, on their graves. Newspaper reports record the deaths and funerals of 'firemen and firewomen' and the Humphrey Jennings film *Fires were Started*, made by the Crown Film Unit in 1943 in celebration of the work of the Auxiliary Fire Service during the Blitz, uses as its alternative title *I was a Fireman*. Out of respect, therefore, and a profound acknowledgement of their identity in their own time, 'Firemen Remembered' uses the word 'firemen' and not 'firefighters'.

The aims of the group are threefold:

Identification: To identify as places of significance in London's Second World War landscape, by marking as 'sites of memory' those places where firemen and firewomen, and sometimes others, lost their lives as a result of enemy action.

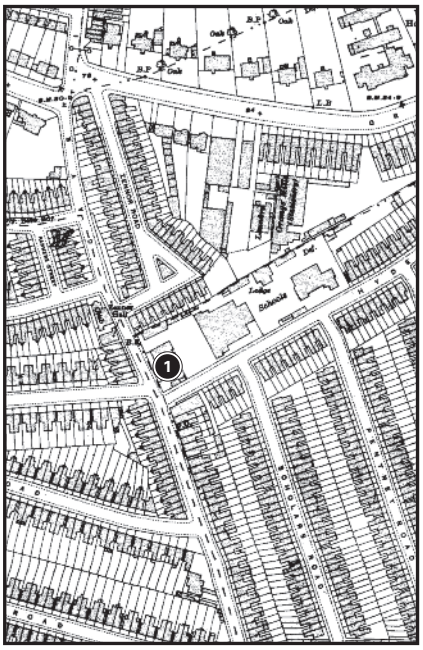
Documentation: To build a unique record of incidents and their context, including specific visual, audio and documentary material.

Education: To use the above information as a starting point for educational projects with an emphasis on local schools and communities, working with children not only to increase their understanding of the period, but also to help instil a sense of continuity and meaning in the concept of Remembrance.

In 1940 Sub-Station 86W was located in Cavendish Road School [1] in Balham and on the night of November 6/7 the canteen received a direct hit, killing 13. These pictures were taken during the clearing-up operation the following day. (LFCDA)

In November 2000, Henry Cavendish School in Balham was the first site to be recognised in this way. In 1940 it was known as Cavendish Road School and was in use as Sub-Station 86W, its main station being No. 86 at Tooting. On the night of November 6/7, 1940, part of the school that served as a kitchen and mess room received a direct hit while the firemen were eating their evening meal and 12 auxiliary firemen and one auxiliary firewoman were killed.

On November 7, 2000 — 60 years after the event — 'Firemen Remembered' was able to join with the staff and pupils at the school to honour those who died. A week earlier the children had been given a talk describing the role of the Fire Service during the war and the part played by their school and the men and women stationed there. Later, a small exhibition was mounted in the entrance to the school telling its wartime history with the aid of photographs and contemporary documents. One



of the aims of 'Firemen Remembered' is to create 'incident tapes' on which the memories of some of those involved at the time are recorded and copies of the recording were also given to the school. This, hopefully, will help to create a deeper understanding of the stories behind the names.

The focus of the ceremony was the unveiling of a memorial plaque. Because of the inclement weather and the large number of children and senior citizens attending, it was felt that the service of remembrance should take place in the school hall. Later, before night fell, the plaque which had been dedicated was mounted on the outside wall of the school, high up so that it is visible to passers-by.

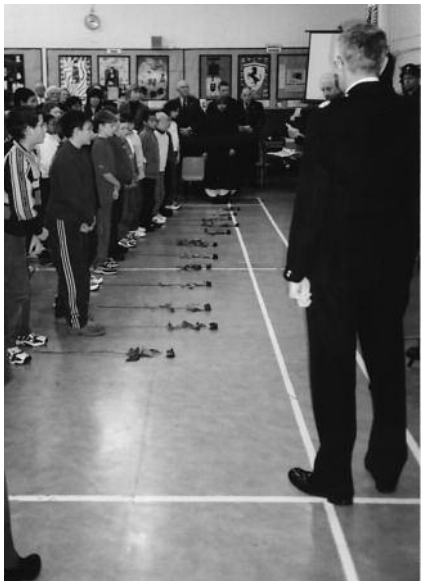
The London Fire Brigade Chaplain, Alan Healey, led the service in which a young actor, John Sheahan, read a moving account of the first night of the London Blitz from *The Bells Go Down. The Diary of an AFS Man*. The Headmistress, Mrs Liz Antrobus, read the poem *The Love That I Have*, written

Right: **November 7, 2000. Ex-fireman Leslie Tyler, who was on duty that night and survived, stands on the spot where his colleagues lost their lives.**

Cavendish Road — 60 years later to the very day. The children at Henry Cavendish Primary School had been told all about the bombing by Stephanie Maltman and of the intention of 'Firemen Remembered' to unveil a plaque to commorate the tragedy which had occurred at their school.

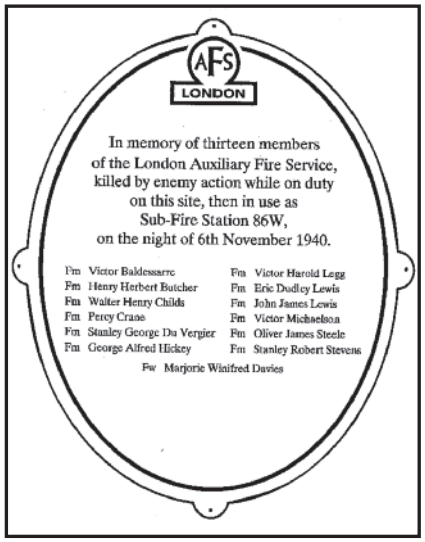
by Leo Marks as a code poem for Violette Szabo, an agent of the Special Operations Executive sent to France (see *After the Battle No. 86)*. The plaque was then unveiled by Mrs Lily Wood, widow of Percy Crane, one of the men who died. The Roll of Honour was read by Leslie Tyler, an AFS messenger based at Cavendish Road School in 1940. Then, as each name was called out, 12 young pupils each laid a red rose. A candle was then lit and placed beneath the plaque while a young bugler, Jack McManus, played the *Last Post* and *Reveille*. A Guard of Honour from Tooting Fire Station stood to attention while the brigade standard was lowered.

The memorial plaque was unveiled by the widow of Fireman Percy Crane and then dedicated by Alan Healey.



As the name of each casualty was read out by Leslie Tyler, so a pupil laid a red rose before the plaque.

Frank Somerville (centre right), appropriately attired in wartime kit, prepares to lay a wreath on behalf of 'Firemen Remembered'.


AFS
LONDON
In memory of thirteen members
of the London Auxiliary Fire Service,
killed by enemy action while on duty
on this site, then in use as
Sub-Fire Station 86W,
on the night of 6th November 1940.
Fm Victor Baldessarre
Fm Henry Herbert Butcher
Fm Walter Henry Childs
Fm Percy Crane
Fm Stanley George Du Vergier
Fm George Alfred Hickey
Fm Victor Harold Legg
Fm Eric Dudley Lewis
Fm John James Lewis
Fm Victor Michaelson
Fm Oliver James Steele
Fm Stanley Robert Stevens
Fw Marjorie Winifred Davies

The children remained perfectly still and silent and, if there are such things as spirits, then at that moment I believe that they must have been very near.

When the ceremony ended the pupils were able to make their own contribution which, under the careful guidance of their teachers, they had been preparing for some weeks. Everybody joined in as they sang a selection of wartime songs with such energy and enthusiasm they ensured that nobody left with a heavy heart. This was followed by tea and buns and a time for reunions and reminiscences.

The Mayoress of Lambeth, people from the local community and parents of many of the children were present for the afternoon, and members of the Fire Brigade Preservation Group in wartime uniform evoked a sense of what it must have been like. The warmth and intimacy of the occasion was only made possible by the goodwill and support of all those involved and this in turn is a positive tribute to those it is our intention to remember.

Les Tyler, Stephanie Maltman and Liz Antrobus with some of the children at the end of a perfect day. Immediately after the service, the plaque was mounted high up on the school building so that it can be seen by passers-by in the street.